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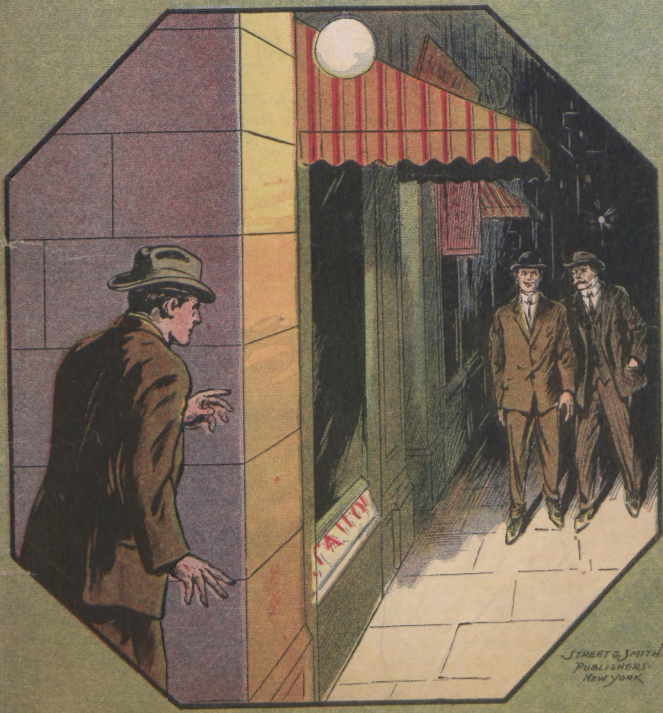
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

A SHOT IN THE DARK



Nick Carter, concealed by the corner of the building, observed with keen suspicion the movements of the approaching men.

NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

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A SHOT IN THE DARK;

OR, J-M

Nick Carter's Midnight Adventure.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A SHOT IN THE DARK.

Nick Carter was walking up the avenue, and two men were walking down it, toward him. They had just crossed Thirty-sixth Street, moving southward; he had just crossed Thirty-fifth Street, northbound. All were on the easterly side of the avenue. The hour, as indicated by the clock on the Herald Building, was half-past two—but it was that hour of the morning.

There were other persons than those two, within the detective's range of vision, farther up the avenue and across on the other side of it, but there was no person to be seen at the moment between him and them; there was no other person that he could see, nearer to them than a hundred feet, or approximately that, in any direction.

Nick Carter noticed all these things vaguely, and would not have realized that he did notice them, had it not been for what followed.

The lights went out!

Those four words are intended to explain that at the electrical station which supplied the power for all the lights in that immediate vicinity, something happened; and whatever it was that happened, the lights went out.

Then there was a pistol shot.

It was followed instantly by one loud cry of terror, or pain, or both, in which no word was articulated. There was no other noise or sound, save the general murmur of the great city, almost stilled at that hour.

The detective halted, to listen for the noise of running feet, or for any sound at all which might determine that any one was attempting to escape from the scene of the pistol shot.

Then Nick moved forward again, swiftly and silently, running on the balls of his feet in order to make no sound himself; and he had covered half the distance, or a trifle more, between the point where he had stopped and that where he had seen the two men who were approaching him, when the city lights flared up again, somewhat dazzling after the sudden darkness.

Nick Carter's first thought was that both the men

he had seen had disappeared, but he instantly perceived that one of them was still there—lying prone upon the pavement; motionless, emitting no sound; to all appearance dead; the other man had disappeared.

The other persons whom Nick had seen, farther up the avenue and across it, came running toward the spot, also; and one whom he had not noticed, who had been behind him, farther down the avenue, came; five in all, Nick, himself, making the sixth who were witnesses to the incident, if witnesses they could be called.

The detective, perceiving that one of the two men had disappeared, and that the spot where the other one had fallen to the pavement was less than fifty feet south of the corner of the Thirty-sixth Street corner, ran on past the fallen man to that corner, determined at all hazards to give chase to the fleeing man, but when he arrived at the corner and looked along the street toward Fifth Avenue, there was not a sign of any person to be seen; the street for the entire length of that block was bare—and there was no use looking across the avenue, or up it, for the fleeing man, for Nick knew that he would not have had time to disappear so utterly, in either of those directions.

Then two policemen appeared; one came from Broadway, through Thirty-sixth Street; the other had been near the corner of Thirty-fourth Street and the avenue. The first of these Nick stopped.

"I am Nick Carter," he said rapidly. "I was walking up the avenue when the shot was fired, a little more than half a block in front of me. The man who fired it must have run around this corner into Thirty-sixth Street, toward Fifth Avenue. Let the other officer take charge here—you are out of your precinct, anyway. Keep watch through the street for a few minutes, and if a man appears between here and Fifth Avenue call to me."

He hurried back to the scene of the crime, then, arriving beside the prostrate body before any of the others had reached it, notwithstanding the short delay.

But the officer who came from the direction of Thirty-fourth Street, and the other men who have been mentioned, arrived on the scene almost at the same moment that he did.

It needed only a glance to assure the detective that the stricken man was dead; that he had died instantly. or with that suddenness that is expressed by that word.

The officer who had come from the direction of Thirty-fourth Street knew Nick Carter, and recognized him at once. Barney Glynn was his name, and Nick knew him to be a most efficient man.

For a moment Nick bent down over the fallen body and made a quick examination, discovering, as has been said, that the man was dead; then he straightened up.

"The man is dead, Barney," he said. "Don't let anybody touch him. Remain here on guard; I will have that other officer telephone in for a patrol wagon. Take the names and the addresses of these five men here, and ask them to wait here till I return."

He turned then and ran back to the corner of Thirty-sixth Street.

"See any one?" he demanded, pausing.

"Not a soul, Mr. Carter. Not a sign of one," was the reply.

"All right. That is Glynn, down there. I told him that you would send for the wagon. Do that, and then go to Glynn. Here comes another copper."

A third officer appeared, running down the avenue toward them, and stopped when he came to the spot where Nick was standing.

"There has been a murder," said the detective. "Barney Glynn is in charge. The man who fired the shot must have run through this street. Will you come with me and see if we can round him up?"

"Sure."

"If he is not in an areaway or a doorway, within two or three hundred feet from here, he isn't in the street at all, and must have dodged into a doorway on the avenue itself," said Nick. "You take the other side; I will take this one."

We need not describe their search more than to say that it was thorough, and that it extended considerably beyond the point to which the man might have fled unseen by Nick, before it was abandoned; nevertheless, when they finally returned to the corner of the avenue, Nick asked the officer to stand there and to keep watch along the street, and to call out if any person should appear along it, coming from an areaway or a house.

Then, for the second time, he returned to the scene of the crime.

The five men were still there, and several others had joined the group—and Barney had their names and addresses written down in his book. The man on the pavement was lying as he had fallen; no hand had touched him as yet; two more policemen had appeared in the meantime, and the situation was well in hand.

Nick bent down over the body again, and made another superficial examination—which was all that could be made under the circumstances, and at that time and place; then he took Barney Glynn's book for a moment, and addressed the five men by name, one after another.

"I want to ask each of you to step aside with me for a moment," he said; "or, if you have no objections and will go around to the station house with me so that I can ask you some questions there, I should prefer that. I assume that each of you is willing to do all you can do to assist in discovering who fired that shot?"

"Certainly," replied one of the men; "only, personally, I know nothing about it——"

"Pardon me, sir, for interrupting you," said the detective, "but not one of us know anything about it more than I observed myself—that the lights went out for a moment, that a shot was fired, and that this dead man was left upon the pavement—I am aware of that. Still, out of that little, we will be able to compare notes, and something may come of it—if you are all willing to assist."

They were, and said so.

Then the patrol wagon rattled up to them; the body of the dead man was lifted into it.

A lieutenant from the station house appeared with the patrol wagon, and to him Nick Carter whispered a few words—with the result that the lieutenant remained on the ground, and bent his steps, as soon as the wagon had gone, toward Thirty-sixth Street.

"I'll have every house searched into which the man might have escaped," he said to Nick in parting; and the detective nodded in reply and went away with the five men he had requested to accompany him to the station house.

The detective took them into the captain's private room.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, "it is my wish to question each of you separately, and I do it in that way because I desire the unbiased opinion of each of you; because I do not want that individual opinion to be influenced in any degree by what one of you may have heard another one say. It is a well-known fact that no two persons, looking upon the same incident at the same time, and from the same place, and under the same circumstances, will describe the incident in exactly the same words; that is why I want the words of each of you separately. Now, if you four will sit down over at that side of the room I will begin with Mr. Sterling. Step this way, Mr. Sterling, if you will be so kind."

They withdrew to a far corner of the room, the captain of the precinct with them, for he happened to be at the station house when the party arrived there. He kept silence, however, while Nick Carter did the questioning.

"Now, Mr. Sterling," said the detective, "will you tell me exactly where you were when the lights went out, and what you had noticed just before that happened?"

"Yes, sir. I was walking down Sixth Avenue, on the west side of it. I was between Thirty-seventh and Thirty-sixth Streets; about midway between them I should say."

"Were you walking rapidly, or slowly?"

"Rapidly. I was in haste to get to bed, having much to do to-morrow. I am staying at the Rialto Hotel."

"Had you noticed other persons along the avenue just before the lights went out?"

"Not particularly. I was conscious that a man was walking toward me on the same side of the avenue. I know now that it was Mr. Catlin—one of the five you have asked to come here with you, Mr. Carter. I understand that to be your name."

"Yes. Had you noticed anybody on the opposite side of the avenue?"

"I think not. I am not aware that I did so."

"You had not seen the two men, walking together, one of whom was shot?"

"No, sir. I am certain that I did not. I might have seen them, but I do not recall that I did so."

"You think that you were about midway of the block when the lights went out?"

"About that; yes."

"How soon after the lights went out did you hear the shot fired, do you think?"

"At once, I should say."

"Counting like this—one, two, three, four, five, six; four counts to the second, approximately—how much do you think you could have counted between the instant when the lights went out and the instant when you heard the shot?"

"Four, perhaps; not more than that, Mr. Carter," was the instant reply.

CHAPTER II.

THE HALF OF A NAME.

"What did you do, Mr. Sterling," Nick Carter asked, continuing the questioning; "what is the first thing that you are now conscious of having done, when the lights went out so suddenly?"

"I stopped stock-still. I was amazed, and, for an instant, frightened."

"Did you start forward again before you heard the shot?"

"Yes."

"How many steps had you taken, do you suppose, before you did hear the shot?"

"Two or three; not more than that."

"What did you do when you heard the shot?"

"I stopped again and stood still, listening."

"What did you hear?"

"Nothing that I am conscious of. It all seemed strangely silent for the moment. Of course, there were the general noises of the city; but there was no sound near by that I remember—that is, at once."

"That is what I mean; at once."

"That is how I understood you; yes."

"Didn't you hear a cry?"

"Oh, yes; just one. I forgot that. It came instantly, following the shot."

"Did you understand the word that was uttered in that cry?"

"No."

"Did you hear any sound like the noise made by a man running?"

"No."

"How long a time did you stand still in that position?"

"Until the lights went up again. I was frightened. I did not move till the lights were turned on again."

"How long a time should you say that was—after the shot was fired?"

"Perhaps I might have counted twenty, rapidly. But I don't know. It seemed a long time, in one sense, and a very short time in another one."

"Then, according to your idea, the shot was fired one second after the lights went out and the lights flashed on again, five seconds after the shot was fired?"

"That would about comprehend my ideas of the circumstances; yes, sir."

"Did you know from which direction the shot came?"

"I know not, but——"

"Did you know then?"

"I think not."

"What was the first thing you noticed after the lights were turned on again?"

"I saw men running toward the spot where the shot had been fired."

"Did you see any person who was running away from that spot?"

"No, sir."

"You ran forward, also, toward the scene of the crime, did you not?"

"I did."

"From your position, you had to cross the avenue diagonally, and, also, you had to cross Thirty-sixth Street, to get to the scene. Did you see any person in Thirty-sixth Street, at that time, while you were approaching the place where the shot was fired?"

"No."

"Did you look through Thirty-sixth Street at all?"

"I don't think so. I was looking at the man on the pavement, and at another man—you, I think it was—who was running toward him."

"Can you tell me of anything else that you did see from the time the lights were on again until you joined the group at the scene of the shooting?"

"No, sir, I cannot."

"Now, one more question: The two men who were together, one of whom fired that shot, and the other of whom is now dead, had been walking down the avenue along the opposite side from where you were, and about a block ahead of you, or a little less. Do you remember, now, to have seen them at all, before the shot was fired?"

"No, sir, I do not."

"That will do, and thank you. Will you remain here while I call the others? Possibly something that one of them might say will refresh your recollection upon a point that you may have neglected—just as you had forgotten the cry, until I reminded you of it."

"Yes. I will remain."

"Mr. Heckman," called the detective, and another of the five came across the room.

"Mr. Heckman," said the detective, as soon as the man had joined them, "how long a time, do you say, the lights were out? Counting by seconds, or minutes, how long a time was it from the instant the lights went out till they flared up again?"

"Two minutes; not more than that."

Nick smiled and glanced toward Sterling.

"If you had begun at one, and had counted rapidly, Mr. Heckman, how many do you think you could have counted, while the darkness lasted?"

"Oh; well, if you put it that way"—he paused and began counting rapidly in an undertone, wrinkling his brows and closing his eyes as he did so; and he had counted three hundred when he opened them—"I should say it was about that long," he added.

"You counted about two to the second," said the detective. "That would be a hundred and fifty seconds—two minutes an a half."

"Yes."

"Upon what do you base your judgment of the time, Mr. Heckman?"

"When I closed my eyes just now I endeavored to fix my mind upon the circumstance, and to live it over again, as clearly as possible. I was walking down Sixth Avenue, on the same side of it that the shot was fired, when the lights went out."

"Where were you, exactly?"

"In the middle of Thirty-seventh Street, crossing it."

"So, when you closed your eyes just now and counted, you imagined yourself back there, and counted over the time you occupied in doing what you did do, after the lights went out until they flared up again?"

"Yes."

"What did you do?"

"I halted for an instant and listened; then I started on again; then the shot——".

"How long was it after the lights went out that you heard the shot?"

The man closed his eyes and counted again, and stopped at ten.

"About that length of time, I think," he said.

"Five seconds."

"What did you do when you heard the shot?"

"I stopped again. I wanted to locate the sound. I thought it was directly ahead of me, but I was not certain about it."

"What did you determine about it?"

"That my judgment had been correct."

"What determined you?"

"I don't know, except that I tried to place the direction from which the sound had come and determined that I had been correct about it in the first instance."

"How long did you stand still, listening?"

"Until the lights were turned on again."

"What did you hear?"

"Nothing, at first—that is, nothing that followed the cry which came almost simultaneously with the sound of the shot."

"You did hear the cry?"

"Certainly."

"What word was uttered in that cry."

"I thought it was a name, rather than a word; or, rather, part of a name."

"That is interesting. What did it suggest to you?"

"The first part of the name Ralph."

"Why that?"

"I can only say, as to that, that the name is a familiar one to me. As I remember the cry now, it sounded like the beginning of an utterance of that name. As I think of it at the present moment it seems absurd that I should have even thought of it—nevertheless, my impression at the time was a distinct one, and it seemed to me as I have said. I have two younger brothers, one of whom is named Ralph. The younger one frequently calls to him abruptly, and it struck me that the cry—the voice and the manner of calling were different, of course—began that name without quite getting to the sound of the letter L."

"There was, of course, nothing in the sound that suggested the voice of your younger brother?" asked Nick, with a smile.

"My younger brother is not yet twelve years old, Mr. Carter. The sound was merely a suggestion; an impression; nothing more; and it was gone as soon as it occurred to me."

"I understand. But impressions of that sort are often of the greatest importance. Now, while you listened, did you hear any person running?"

"No; I am positive that I did not. That is really what I listened for, as much as anything."

"Did you hear anything at all that is worth repeating to me?"

"No."

"What had you noticed along the avenue, and whom had you noticed, before the lights went out?"

"This gentleman—Mr. Sterling—across, on the opposite side, half a block in advance of me; another man whom I now know to have been Mr. Catlin, approaching him in the same side of the avenue, and still another one who had just turned the corner from Thirty-seventh Street, into the avenue, and who had turned in the same direction that I was going. He was half a block ahead of me. I now know him to have been Mr. Coyne, one of the five of us who came here with you."

"Had you seen the two men, one of whom is dead, and the other who probably fired the shot?"

"I think not. I am not conscious that I noticed them at all."

"Have you anything to suggest, or any opinion to advance, in regard to this entire incident, Mr. Heckman?"

"I don't think so. No, sir, I am sure not."

"Will you think the matter over carefully when you are alone, and try to think if something occurs to you that you have forgotten?"

"Certainly; but I have been thinking deeply upon the subject ever since the thing occurred, Mr. Carter. I don't believe that I have forgotten anything."

"Have you any theory in your mind as to the method of escape from the scene of the man who fired the shot?"

"No—unless he could have darted into a doorway close to where the thing happened. I was not close enough to be a good judge of what he might have done. You were closer than I, were you not?"

"Yes. I will call Mr. Catlin now; thank you."

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY OF A SHOT.

"Mr. Catlin," said the detective, "you were walking up Sixth Avenue, on the opposite side, when the shot was fired," said the detective, as soon as Catlin had joined them. "How long after the light went out was it, when you heard the shot?"

"I have been trying to decide that question while I have been waiting for you to call me, Mr. Carter," was the reply. "I should say, to the best of my ability, that it was rather less than half a minute."

"How much less?"

"Oh, I don't know. I had come through Thirty-fourth Street to Broadway, had crossed diagonally to Thirty-fifth Street, passing in front of the Herald Building, and had turned up Sixth Avenue. I was in haste. I had just crossed Thirty-sixth Street when the lights went out. I think I halted for an instant—perhaps while you could count rapidly, four or five, and then I went on again. I traverse that route every night at about that time, and the way is perfectly familiar to me. If I thought anything at all about the lights going out, I probably supposed that they were switching to another dynamo at the power house—but I do not think I even thought about it, more than to notice it, until I heard the shot. Then I stopped for sure."

"What else did you do?"

"I listened."

"What did you hear?"

"Several things. I heard the cry, of course."

"Did the cry suggest a word, or a name to you, Mr. Catlin?"

"Well, now that I think of it, if the man who cried had been trying to shout the word rat, and didn't quite get to the T, it would explain about what it sounded like to me."

"Just Ra—, eh? Like Rah?"

"Something of that sort; but more the sound of a, in rat, than in ah. But I should say that the sound of the letter R was there all right."

"Mr. Sterling, do you also recall such a sound to the cry now?" asked the detective, turning toward that gentleman.

"No. I don't think I received any impression at all about the cry, save that it was one of fright, and, possibly, pain," was the reply.

"Please continue, Mr. Catlin. What else did you hear? You were almost directly opposite the scene, and, though no nearer than I was to it, you may have heard what I did not."

"I heard a voice—and I think it was the voice of one of those two men—exclaim, when the lights went out."

"What was said?"

"It sounded like the two words, 'There goes——' as if he had started to say, 'There goes the light,' and did not complete it. Then came the shot and the cry, almost at once."

"How long a time, in your judgment, after the light went out?"

"I have already said—less than half a minute. I am not good at determining fractions of time, Mr. Carter."

"How long a time do you think the lights were out, altogether?"

"Not much more than a minute."

"When you heard the shot, and the cry, what did you do?"

"I ran up close to the buildings on my side of the street, and crouched down, making myself as small as possible. I did not know how many more shots might be fired, and I had no fancy for stopping one of the bullets. I have lived around that part of the city all my life, you know."

"Then, instead of actually stopping when you heard the shot, you ran close to the building nearest to you and crouched down. Then is when you listened, eh?"

"Yes."

"What did you hear, then?"

"I thought I heard somebody running lightly, as if on his toes. I now think it must have been you that I heard. I don't recall any other sound."

"Did you remain, crouched down as you were, until the lights flared up again?"

"I think I had just risen to my feet again when the lights came up. I had about decided that there would be no more shots."

"Why?"

"Well, usually they follow each other quickly, don't they?"

"I suppose so. You had just crossed Thirty-sixth Street when the lights went out?"

"Yes."

"Had you noticed the two men at the opposite side of the street?"

"I don't remember that I had done so; no, I think not."

"Did you see any persons moving in Thirty-sixth street?"

"No. I think not; but there might have been a dozen, and I not have seen them. I had just been playing poker with some friends, and I had won. I was thinking about that."

"Had you noticed Mr. Sterling, or Mr. Heckman, or Mr. Coyne, all of whom were plainly in sight from where you were?"

"I don't remember that I even saw them. I suppose I was conscious of the fact that others were on the street, but that is all."

"When you ran across the avenue toward the scene of the shooting, you went from the northwest to the southeast corner of Thirty-sixth Street, or about that, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Did you see any person in Thirty-sixth Street, then?"

"No. I wasn't looking up Thirty-sixth Street. I was looking at the dead man on the sidewalk."

"But, if a man had been running through Thirty-sixth Street, toward Fifth Avenue, just then, don't you think you would have noticed him?"

"I don't know. I might have done so. I am not sure. The likelihood is that I would not have seen such a man. I was rather excited, I think."

"Have you anything to add to the information you have already given me?"

"None at all, Mr. Carter. I cannot even guess how the man who fired the shot could have got out of sight so quickly."

"It is strange," said Nick thoughtfully. "Very strange." Then he turned and called to the last of the five men—Mr. Sturges.

"Where were you when the shot was fired, Mr. Sturges?" he asked the man.

"Between Thirty-fourth and Thirty-fifth Streets, going north, and about a third of the distance from Thirty-fourth to Thirty-fifth," was the reply.

"What did you do when the lights went out?"

"Nothing."

"Didn't you stop, if only for an instant?"

"No. I slowed down a bit, I think; I was walking very moderately, anyway; but that is all. I didn't stop until I heard the shot, and the cry that followed it, instantly."

"Did you stop then?"

"You bet I did."

"Did the sound of the cry suggest anything to you?"

"It suggested that somebody had a bullet in him, and that it hurt."

"I mean, did you recognize any word, or name, in the cry?"

"No—unless it might have been the exclamation, Ah."

"Did it sound like that word to you?"

"As much like it as like anything else. It didn't sound like anything at all."

"How long a time do you think the lights were out, Mr. Sturges?"

"A couple of minutes, probably."

"How far had you walked from the instant the lights went out until you heard the shot, and stopped?"

"Ten or twelve steps, maybe. I don't know."

"When you stopped, what did you do, besides?"

"I ran for the entrance to a store and stood there, out of the way as much as possible."

"What else did you hear, after that?"

"Nothing that I noticed. I was listening for the sound of another shot."

"What else have you to say on the subject?"

"Nothing; except that I had seen you ahead of me; at least, I know now that it was you—or that it must have been you—just about a block ahead of me."

"Did you notice any of these gentlemen who are present?"

"I think I saw—no, I did not. I was conscious that others were on the streets, of course, but there is no use trying to recall what I do not remember, is there?"

"No."

"Well, Mr. Carter, if there isn't anything more that you want of me, I'd like to get along home."

"There is no reason for detaining any of you any longer," said Nick. "You may all go, of course, and I thank you for your willingness to come here and assist me, as you have done. There is only one thing——"

"What is that, sir?" asked Heckman, speaking for all of them.

"If you will kindly give me your full names, and your addresses, I may want to see one or all of you again; and, besides, if we should succeed in arresting any person, in connection with this affair, I might want to ask you if you could remember him. But it seems, now, as if the murderer had succeeded in making good

his escape. Captain, can I trouble you for a sheet of paper and a pen?"

The captain left his chair at the desk.

"Right here," he said. "There is pen and ink, and everything. Use that pad, Nick."

"Here is my card——" began the man named Heckman, and Nick smilingly accepted it; but he said, as he did so: "Won't you please write down your name and address on that pad, Mr. Heckman, so that I can have them all together? Cards have such a habit of getting lost, or misplaced. Thank you. And now you, Mr. Sterling; and you, Mr. Catlin. Now, Mr. Coyne. Sturges, you are the last. Thank you. Now, captain"—Nick turned so that his back was toward all of the men when he faced the captain, and he slowly closed one eye while he continued: "If there is any question which you would like to ask these gentlemen before they go—eh?—I will go on outside."

The captain understood that wink of Nick's to mean that he would like to have the five men detained there in the private office for a moment, and so he said:

"Just a moment, gentlemen, if you please. You know, this is my precinct, and very naturally I dislike to have anything of this sort happen in it; eh?"

"Assuredly," said Heckman.

"So, if any one of you should remember something that has escaped your recollection at this moment, I'd be obliged to you if you would come here and tell me about it."

"Certainly; most certainly," said Heckman, again.

"And if any question should occur to me that I would like to ask of any of you, or of all of you, you would come here freely enough, of course; eh?"

"Surely. At any time, captain," replied Heckman, again.

"You see"—the captain was trying to kill time, but at that moment Nick came bustling into the room again, all smiles—and he left the door open so that the men could pass out at once, which they proceeded to do; and when they had gone the detective turned to the captain, and said:

"Captain, I wonder if it has occurred to you that the murderer might have been in this room with us all the time?"

CHAPTER IV.

NICK FIXES THE TIME.

"Oh, yes," said the captain, with a broad grin, replying to the last remark made by the detective. "It occurs to me that he might be here even now, Nick; eh? As nearly as I can understand it, you were the nearest one of the bunch to that chap outside when he was shot down."

"So it would appear," said the detective dryly.

"And that reminds me," the captain went on, "that I have not heard your version of the affair yet."

"No; I haven't given it—yet."

"What's the matter with giving it now—to me?"

"Nothing—while we are awaiting the arrival of the coroner. I asked the lieutenant to have the body left severely alone until the coroner gets here."

"Nobody will touch it. Now, Nick, honest Injun, what do you think about the affair?"

"A put-up job," was the quick reply.

"Eh? Lights, and all? Eh?"

"Oh, I am not prepared to say that, captain. But I will do what you asked me to do. I will tell you about the thing, as I saw it."

"I wish you would. I'd like to catch the chap that did the shooting."

"I think we will do that, sooner or later, captain, unless I am entirely at sea."

"You are not that, very often—unless you are on a steamship, Nick," said the captain, with one of his hearty laughs.

"Oh, I don't know. We all get mixed up about things at times, and I may be awfully mixed about this affair."

"How so?"

"I'll get to the answer to that question presently."

"All right."

"I was walking up Sixth Avenue. I had just crossed Thirty-fifth Street. I think I must have stepped upon the curb, from Thirty-fifth, at about the same instant that they stepped upon the curb at Thirty-sixth. I saw them approaching me, but I noticed only that two men were coming. I did not take notice of their appearance. They were too far away for me to have seen them distinctly, anyhow."

"Sure thing, Nick."

"I had taken, perhaps, a dozen steps along that block when the lights went out; when I say that, I mean that every light in that immediate vicinity went out."

"I know."

"'That is funny,' I said to myself, and stopped and half turned around to see how far down the avenue the lights had gone out—to see if the effect was general, or only local."

The captain nodded comprehendingly.

"Then I heard the pistol shot and the cry."

"Good. I'll try your game now, Nick."

"All right. What is it?"

"I heard you when you were questioning those chaps who were here; so, how long do you figure that it was after the lights went out before you heard the shot, Nick?"

"About four seconds, I should say. Then the shot and the cry; and——"

"Wait. What did that cry sound like to you? You have asked all the others that question, so now you answer it yourself."

"It didn't sound like anything at all, captain. It was just a cry of terror and shock, that any person might, or might not, utter, if shot in that manner. Human beings are differently constituted, you know. I might cry out under such a circumstance, you might not; or, vice versa."

"Well."

"It was a cry that was merely the result of the shock of being shot; just as such a cry might result from somebody springing out from behind a door upon another."

"I see what you mean."

"Such a cry means nothing. It is only a startled cry. A woman would scream; a man, ordinarily, would swear."

"Uh-huh. I understand. All the same, I thought the explanation of the sound, offered by that chap named Heckman, was very clever."

"It was, captain; almost too clever."

"Eh? What do you mean by that?"

"I haven't decided yet what I do mean by it."

"Oh, well, go on."

"You were asking questions. Go ahead with them, captain."

"How long were the lights out, then?"

"Well, to answer that properly, I'll tell you what I did while they were out."

"All right. Go ahead. That is what Heckman did, isn't it?"

"It is what he tried to do—and he had to concentrate considerably in order to do it."

"So would you—either of us, in fact."

"Perhaps."

"When I heard the shot and the cry—they were practically simultaneous—I bent forward to listen. I didn't expect another shot; or, at least, that is not what I listened for; but I did think I would hear somebody running—and I meant to head off such a person, if I did hear it."

"Of course."

"Well, I didn't hear any such sound. There wasn't any sound at all that I could hear, and so I started to run myself toward the place whence the shot had come."

"Did you make any noise when you ran?"

"Not a sound; certainly not one that could have been heard across the avenue."

"Catlin said he heard somebody running, and thought it must have been you."

"That is precisely what I am referring to, captain."

"Oh, I see. Go on."

"I had covered half the distance, not more, when the lights flared up again—that is to say, about a hundred feet, or a trifle less."

"Yes."

"I think the record for a hundred yards—three hundred feet—is nine seconds, or very near that; but by a sprinter, in very little clothing, who starts at a jump and who crosses the goal at full speed."

"About that, yes."

"I'm not a professional sprinter; I was fully clothed; I did not start from a jump—and I did not run at my best speed, which would be a hundred yards in about eleven seconds."

"I see what you are getting at."

"I ran at, say, about half speed; perhaps not even that."

"More than likely less than that. You ran on your toes, of course, listening while you ran."

"Precisely. Call it a third-speed, and say that I actually ran thirty yards: I would have covered the distance in about nine seconds, or eight at the best."

The captain nodded.

"I figure that I stopped and listened, before I started to run, about seven or eight seconds—possibly ten; but seven at the very least."

"Well?"

"Add that to the nine that I was running toward the spot before the lights flared on again. At the least we have sixteen seconds—and when the lights were turned on again it was dazzling, for an interval; say another second—or two."

"Yes."

"Well, you can safely figure on sixteen seconds having elapsed from the firing of the shot until I was able to notice anything that was going on around me—and if you remember the fact that I was running toward the spot where the shot was fired, and that my eyes were directed at that spot when the lights were turned

on, you can count another second or two before I could take in other things around me. Now, if you had been there, what would you have been looking for at that instant, captain?"

"Somebody making a getaway."

"Certainly. And where would you have looked?"

"Everywhere that I could."

"Of course; but, straight ahead at first, then everywhere you could. That is natural."

"Yes. What would you have expected to see? What would have been the most likely thing that you would have looked for, just then?"

"Somebody running."

"Surely; but, away from the scene, not toward it, eh?"

"Naturally."

"And if everybody within sight was running toward you—everybody whom you could see in that first brief glance that you had, and if there was a corner of the street and avenue just beyond the scene of the shooting, you would have concluded as I did, wouldn't you?—that the man who did the shooting had beat it around that corner."

"I guess I would, Nick."

"Well, I did that very thing. There wasn't a person in sight, in Thirty-sixth Street—and if the chap that did the shooting had gone around that corner into that street, he could not have gotten out of sight so completely in that time."

"Not unless——"

"I have tried all the 'unlesses,' captain. There isn't one of them left. There is a copper outside now waiting for me, who belongs to the Thirty-sixth precinct. He was on his way home at the time, off duty. He heard the shot when he was over on Broadway, and he ran toward the spot. He did a few things for me. He was in Thirty-sixth Street, running toward Sixth Avenue from Broadway, when the lights were turned on. He says that he looked everywhere he could as he ran forward, and that there was nobody in Thirty-sixth Street at all, and he is sure he would have seen such a person had there been one. He is a cool-headed chap, and I believe him. He would have seen such a person."

"Then there wasn't anybody there, Nick?"

"No. But, nevertheless, one of your men helped me search along the areas and doorways of that street. We didn't find anybody. There wasn't anybody there."

"Then—where did the fellow go to who fired the shot?" asked the captain.

"There are only two directions in which he could have gone, captain."

"What two?"

"Up the avenue—or across it."

"But you would have seen him and have noticed him, Nick, in that case."

"Yes—if he hadn't stopped and turned around, and then ran back again."

"Oho; I see what you are getting at. And that reminds me."

"Of what, captain?"

"That there was one of those chaps you did not question. Coyne."

"I talked with him while we were walking over here from the scene of the shooting. His story is substantially the same as the others."

"But he was the nearest one to the spot, except yourself, Nick."

"Except myself—and Catlin; yes. The point is, captain, that one of these two men, or all of the four who were north of the spot at the time, knows who did the shooting."

"Gee," said the captain.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN NICK CARTER GOT BUSY.

"What did Coyne tell you?" asked the captain.

"That he had walked through Thirty-seventh Street from Fifth Avenue, on the south side of Thirty-seventh, and turned southward on Sixth Avenue; that he was about halfway of the block to Thirty-sixth Street when the lights went out; that he had noticed that two men were ahead of him nearly a block away, when he turned upon the avenue; that he took no notice of them except that; that when the lights went out he kept on a few paces before he stopped, but that he stopped the instant before he heard the pistol shot; that the cry of the man who was shot sounded merely like a cry of pain; that the duration of the darkness seemed a long time to him, and he could not even guess how long it was, because he was so badly frightened—and that he ran toward the scene of the shooting as soon as the lights were turned on again. You see, his story is substantially the same as the others."

"Yes."

"Are you insinuating, Nick, that one of those five men did that murder?"

"No. I am not insinuating anything. I am saying,

very plainly, that one of two of the five men who were here in this room did the shooting; and that four out of the five of them knows who did it, and were in the conspiracy to have it done, and that the fifth one—Sturges—may, or may not, have been concerned in it. That is what I am saying."

"And you have permitted the whole bunch of them to go away."

"Sure thing. I have given them some rope with which to hang themselves."

"Gee, Nick, your theory is a startling one. You are always seeing conspiracies in these affairs."

"Well, I generally find them when they exist."

"I'll admit that, all right. But this one——"

"Well?"

"Go on. What else?"

"In the first place, captain, look at the facts of the case."

"That is precisely what I am trying to do, Nick."

"Very good. The most important fact of all, and one which nobody can get around, is that the man who did the shooting could not possibly have got out of sight."

"I'm not sure that I am admitting that, Nick."

"Look here, captain, if O'Neil of the Thirty-sixth precinct had not been where he was, and if I had not been where I was, perhaps I would not admit it, either; as it is, I am sure of it. The man who did the shooting could not have escaped into one of the buildings on the avenue near him; he could not have escaped through Thirty-sixth Street; he could not have gone anywhere under the circumstances as they existed, except up the avenue, or across it; and he had just about time enough to get to the place where Catlin says he was, or to the place where Coyne says he was, and to turn around and be prepared to run toward the place where the shooting occurred, before the lights were turned on."

"And that is the way you see it, is it?"

"Yes."

"Then why the blazes didn't you lock up the bunch while they were here?" blazed the captain.

"Would any judge in the city have held any one of them, or all of them, captain, on the representations that I have made to you?" asked the detective, smiling.

"No; I suppose not."

"Certainly not. The only way to do was what I did, let them all go, and with the idea that suspicion against any of them had never occurred to any of us."

"Well, I'll be blowed if it had occurred to me."

"Captain, it was only the accumulation of circumstances that made it occur to me."

"Just go over them for my benefit, will you?"

"Certainly. First, there was O'Neil, from the Thirty-sixth precinct. O'Neil sees a lot, even if one of his eyes isn't straight. It doesn't interfere with his efficiency in any way, as I happen to know. He is every inch a good copper. I know him, if he doesn't know me. He ran through that street from Broadway, and he had his eyes peeled. He would have seen a man running in the street toward Fifth Avenue—and there is not a place along there into which a man could have dodged, where your man and I would not have found him, two or three minutes later, when we made the search. Both the saloons were closed on that corner."

"I know."

"Second, I know that nobody ran down the avenue past me, even in the middle of it, as I was running toward the shooting, and listening before I ran. I know that."

"Well?"

"Catlin says he heard somebody running, and thinks it was me. He could not have heard me, I know; and there wasn't any one else running, or I would have heard it, too."

"Go on."

"The first man I questioned—Sterling—did not suggest a thought of suspicion to me; but when I tackled the second man—Heckman—he struck me as being altogether too analytical. He was too exact, under the circumstances, and that talk about his two brothers was rather far-fetched; clever, you called it; I called it too clever, if you will remember."

"Yes."

"Then Catlin took up a repetition of that, with a modification. In other words, he thought the idea suggested by Heckman was a good one, and sought to strengthen it. He used rat, instead of Ralph, for the word, that is all; the result was the same."

"But why should it have been suggested at all?"

"The result, captain, of being too smart—on the part of Heckman; and not smart enough on the part of Catlin. It would have suggested a possible clew, if only Heckman had noticed it, and might have taken our minds—mine, I should say—from the other circumstances. Heckman frowned and stirred uneasily when Catlin talked about the sound of rat; and he was not smart enough to control that impulse."

"Oh, well, it is too deep for me."

"No, it is not. The whole point is that the man who did the shooting could not have got away as he seemed to have done; and the point that makes that all the more important, is the fact that the man who did do the shooting, and his confederates, if he had them, could have had no idea that a detective would happen to be right there on the spot when the murder was to be committed."

"It is your idea, then, that the whole thing was planned—thoroughly premeditated?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Even to the short-circuiting of the lights, or whatever it was that happened to put them out?"

"You have asked me that already, and I have replied that I do not go as far as that. I don't know about that; but, all the same, I wish you would go, personally, if you will, to the power house and find out how it did happen. They will tell you—and you need not tell them just why you want to know."

"I'll do that, Nick."

"All right; and let me know at once what you find out."

"I am still thinking that you ought not to have permitted all those fellows to go," said the captain.

"I let them go for several reasons. The one I have given you is enough; but there are others just as good, and better, if you want them."

"All right. What are they?"

"I wasn't out alone to-night, captain, for one thing. Both of my assistants were with me, although we were not together. Chick, as it happened, was between Thirty-fourth and Thirty-fifth, on the east side of the avenue, when the lights went out. When the lights were turned on again, I knew he would be running toward the spot, too, and I waved a signal to him to turn through Thirty-fifth, knowing that he would understand that he was expected to head off the man I thought was escaping through Thirty-sixth. See that?"

"Yes."

"He went around the block, returning through Thirty-sixth. I knew he would be outside, when I left those five men in here with you, after suggesting that you detain them for a moment. See that?"

"Yes."

"When the lights went out, I knew that Patsy would be on the avenue, at the corner of Thirty-eighth Street, waiting for us. That was the arrangement. I knew that he would run toward the sound of the shot, too. It doesn't matter just why we were in those relative positions, but it happened so. We were on another case, that is all."

"I understand."

"When I met O'Neil at the corner, after the lights were on, Patsy was sprinting toward us down the avenue. I waved a signal to him, and he went up Thirty-seventh Street toward Fifth Avenue, to return through Thirty-sixth. That was the only street through which the man who fired the shot could have escaped. I had it covered, so that he could not get through it."

"I see."

"I knew, when I went out of this office, and left you here with the five men for a moment, that Patsy would be out there, as well as Chick. See that?"

"Sure."

"Well, at the present moment, Chick is on the trail of Heckman—Heckman impressed me as being the brains of the outfit, if it is an outfit, as I verily believe it to be—and Patsy is on the trail of Catlin; and each of them have some special instructions about what is to be done, which I gave to them when I left this room."

"What sort of instructions, Nick?"

"I'll tell you one thing I directed them to do."

"Well?"

"To find a way, if possible, to pick the pockets of the whole bunch."

"To pick their pockets?" exclaimed the captain, surprised.

"Yes. There is something in the pockets of one of them that I want."

"What is that?"

"The pistol from which the shot was fired, captain."

"Gee whiz, Nick, do you believe they can get it?"

"If it is there to be got at—yes."

"But what about Coyne, and the other two?"

"Evidently, captain, you haven't much faith in the efficacy of your Central Office men. Oh, I'll take that back, for I know you have; but it occurred to me that one or more of the detectives from the Central Office would not be far off by the time I got here with those five men. You see, O'Neil telephoned in for the patrol wagon, saying that there had been a murder. Of course, that information went at once to headquarters. Of course, headquarters would get busy, and also, of course, by the time I and the five men would have walked here from the scene of the crime, one, or two, or three Central Office men would have been notified from headquarters, and would be on the job. Before

I came in here to talk to the five men, I asked the lieutenant at the desk to slip the information to any such men as appeared, that I would have something to tell them when I came outside. There were two of them here, and so Coyne and Sterling are taken care of, too. In a word, the two men from the Central Office, and Patsy and Chick, are all working together. See that point, captain?"

CHAPTER VI.

A DEAD MAN'S TESTIMONY.

The captain gazed at the detective with smiling admiration in his eyes.

"Half an hour ago," he said, "it looked to me as if we didn't have any case at all; as if the fellow who did that shooting had got off scot-free, and we had only a dead man left as a witness. Now, it looks like a cinch."

"And yet, it won't do to be too sanguine."

"I suppose not."

"While I am morally certain that one of two certain men did that shooting, and that four out of the five who were here were implicated in the affair, it will be decidedly another thing to prove it."

"You are right there, Nick. It will be a hard thing to prove unless you can get hold of that pistol."

"I don't really depend very much upon the pistol, unless for the purpose of convincing myself still more than I am convinced now. People as slick as they have proved themselves to be in carrying out this thing, would not be very long about getting rid of such evidence as the pistol with which the shooting was done."

"All the same, pistols are not easy things to get rid of. They can't be thrown away, you know, without being found. And that reminds me, I ought to send one of my men back there where this thing happened, Nick, to look for that gun."

"I have already provided for that, captain," said the detective, with a smile.

"It looks as if you thought of everything."

"I tried to, as soon as I became convinced that these men did the thing."

"What did you do in regard to the pistol?"

"I asked Barney Glynn, one of your men, to look for it. He'll be off his post for a short time while he is doing it, but you won't mind that. He has probably been relieved by this time."

"Relieved? What do you mean by that?"

"I told him to telephone to the house—my house—for Danny Maloney, my chauffeur. Now, Danny has two talents. He would never make a detective in the world; not the real sort, you know; but he has two talents that come in mighty handy at times."

"What are they, Nick?"

"He is the best chauffeur that ever sat under a steering wheel, for one thing; but he also has a pair of eyes like a weasel, for seeing things. He could find the proverbial needle in the haystack, if I should send him to search for it; he has a positive talent in that way."

"I see."

"I told Barney to tell Danny that I wanted him to find that pistol, and to tell him that it might have been poked away almost anywhere within a certain space."

"Say, Nick, supposing one of those two men, Catlin or Coyne, did have the pistol, and supposing that he wanted to get rid of it right then and there, what could he have done with it?"

"If Catlin had it, I don't see that he could have done anything much with it, captain—unless he is fleeter of foot than I take him to be, and did succeed in getting all the way across the avenue after the shot was fired, before he had to turn around and pretend to run back toward the place where the shooting occurred. If Catlin is the man who did the murder, I am inclined to think that he still has the pistol on him—unless one of my lads has already lifted it."

"Well, Coyne, then?"

"Coyne, if he fired the shot, remained on the same side of the street, and simply ran back across Thirty-sixth Street and as far up the avenue as he dared to go, before he turned around. If he had the pistol, he might have dropped it through a grating, or into something."

"Sure."

"Anyhow, I told Barney to tell Danny to search everywhere around there—and as soon as he could get into the buildings along there, in the morning, to go into the cellars and find out if the thing had been dropped through a grating."

The captain opened his lips to reply, but stopped, for the door opened, and one of the officers entered to announce that the coroner had arrived.

The dead man was apparently about thirty years old.

He was rather handsome of feature, though he had a look of a reckless man who drank a good deal more

than was good for him. He wore a mustache that was on the blond order, and his hair was thin.

He was well dressed, in fashionable clothing, and there were plenty of things in his pockets to identify him as far as the mere name was concerned; but identification went no farther than that.

His linen was marked with the initials J. C., and there was a silver card case in one of his pockets containing cards which bore the engraved name of Jasper Carew; but there were no letters which gave an address, and there was nothing to establish where he might have been living.

Still, there were laundry marks upon his clothing by which it was thought that fact might be ascertained, and one of the captain's men was detailed to make the investigation.

The bullet, a thirty-two caliber, had been fired into the back of his head, and there was every indication that the muzzle of the pistol had been held close against the man's head when the shot was fired—and the bullet had passed all the way through the skull, coming out again at the top of the forehead, where the hair began to grow.

The hat he had worn, which had been picked up beside him, bore the imprint of a well-known dealer along Broadway, and it was arranged that the clerks in that store should be asked to view the body for further identification, as soon as the store should open in the morning—and it was rapidly getting toward that hour then.

The clothing was a ready-made suit, manufactured by a firm in Rochester, which supplies stores all over the country; but, nevertheless, another officer was detailed to call upon two or three clothiers, taking the coat and vest with him, in the hope that it might be discovered where the suit had been purchased—and when.

It had the appearance of not having been worn more than a week at most.

He wore a watch that was worth about twenty dollars, one ring, an ordinary cheap scarfpin, blue shirt and tie, and so on. His shoes were good, and also new, and came from a dealer farther down on Sixth Avenue; and that store might also prove to be a source of information.

The entire absence from his pockets of all letters and papers bearing any such thing as an address was significant; it suggested that the man had purposely left them out of his equipment that night, for some specific purpose.

But what could have been that purpose? It was not an easy question to answer.

There was a loaded revolver in one of his pockets, too.

That bore evidence of having been recently cleaned and loaded, and put in perfect order, as if the man who carried it had anticipated the immediate use of the weapon. It was a short thirty-eight, of what is commonly known as the bulldog pattern.

In the same pocket with the revolver were two loose cartridges—and their presence was significant, also, when taken in conjunction with the fact that in the same pocket, tucked carefully down at the bottom of it, was a strip of cotton cloth that was white and clean.

"What do you make of those things, Mr. Carter?" the coroner asked the detective.

"The suggestion is," replied Nick, "that the man went out last night, armed to meet with trouble; or, I will put it still stronger. It looks to me as if he went out looking for trouble. I should, in fact, say that the man really expected to shoot somebody himself, and that he carried the two loose cartridges for the purpose of replacing two others in the chambers of the gun, that he might be called upon to use."

"And the rag——"

"Was to clean the gun after it had been used, of course; to destroy the evidence that it had been used."

"I see." It was the captain who spoke now. "Then you are of the opinion that they were all of a kind, eh? This fellow and the five who were here."

"About that."

"What is this?" asked the coroner.

He had been searching through the waistcoat pockets, and now he brought out several small bits of folded paper.

One of them was a red laundry ticket, from a Chinese laundry—and, of course, there was no address upon it. Still, there was a way of finding out what Chinaman had issued it, and it was put aside for that purpose.

There were also several apparent memoranda, which meant nothing at all to the searchers, on their faces. One was a lot of figures, as if the man had been figuring up his expenses, and had crowded the result of it into the pocket.

Another contained the notation: "Poster, at five; the thirtieth." That was all, and it meant nothing.

There was a street-railway ticket good on the surface lines in the city of Washington, and as it was not pocket-worn, or soiled, it suggested that the man had recently been in that city.

There was also a folded slip of paper which was

quite clean, and upon this a message had been written in pencil. The paper looked as if it had been wadded up in the palm of the hand before it had been smoothed out again and folded; and it was, nevertheless, clean.

Nick read carefully what had been written upon it.

"I think," he said, after a moment, "that this scrap of paper is rather a good indication of the correctness of our premises, so far, captain. Listen, I will read it to you."

"Go ahead."

"It is just a bare statement, with no superscription and no signature. It looks to me as if it had been written hastily—or as if it had been thrust into the pocket hastily, after it was written; as if to get it out of the sight of some person who was approaching unexpectedly."

"Do you mean that the man wrote it himself?"

"That is the way it looks to me."

"Then what good is it to us?"

"That is what I am trying to determine. But I will read it, and we will discuss it afterward, if that is necessary."

"Go ahead."

"The note says: 'You are looking for me and I am looking for you, and that is all there is about that. I don't propose to let up, and I don't suppose you will. But I will meet you. I won't see you in any house, or inside of any walls. I know you too well. I shall be ready for you if you try any of your gun plays on me, be sure of that, if I haven't any notches on my gun same as you have. You can make it the same hour, all right, and I will be strolling along Six——'"

The note ended abruptly at that point; but whether it was intended to be ended there or there had been an interruption before the note was completed, could not be told.

"What do you make out of it, Nick?" asked the captain. "It doesn't sound much to me; and if the note was written by the man himself and never sent, what good is it to us?"

CHAPTER VII.

WAS THERE ANOTHER CRIME?

"I think," said Nick meditatively, "that this is not a message received by this man who is now dead, and hastily thrust into his pocket. He does not look to me like the cool sort of a person who is accustomed to meeting gun plays, as this note suggests. Does he to you?"

"No."

"But he does look like the kind who would send that sort of a reply to another whom he had reason to believe meant to kill him, if there was a chance."

"Perhaps."

"I think that this man wrote the note in reply to a request he had received, either verbal or written, and that one of two things happened after he had written it."

"Well?"

"Either it did not suit him after he had written, and he crammed it into his pocket, after resisting a first impulse to destroy it—or he was interrupted in the writing of it, and wadded it up in one of his hands, and then thrust it into his pocket. That is the way it looks to me."

"Well, what does it suggest to you?"

"Merely that this dead man went out upon Sixth Avenue, just before he was shot, to meet the man who shot him, by appointment. That he went armed, prepared to defend himself, and believing that he was capable of doing so."

"Go on. That isn't all, Nick."

"No. He met the man who killed him. They met, probably, somewhere near the spot where this man was killed. They walked down the avenue together, coming into my sight just before the killing occurred.

"I think, further, from what I have already figured upon this case, that this dead man was one of a gang of which the other four of that group were also a part; and that the man whom this Jasper Carew was to meet did not go there alone, but arranged so that the others would be near at hand in case of need. That would account for the presence of all of them at the place at the psycological moment."

"But why should they be there? They were too far away to be of any assistance in the shooting."

"They were not too far away to do what they did do. They were there to assist the man who was to do the shooting, after it should take place. To run toward him; to testify that some one else did it; to appear there as perfect strangers, with no interest in the man who did the shooting, but prepared to give testimony, if it should be necessary, which would effectually clear him."

"Maybe you are right."

"The note doesn't help us materially, only merely as a clincher upon what he had already determined in the case."

"That the four men who were there were accessories, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, Nick, it looks to me as if I ought to send out right now and take those fellows in, and put 'em through the third degree. What do you think about it?"

"I don't think it ought to be done; at least, not until we have more to uphold us than a mere opinion of mine."

"But, the way you put it, the opinion sounds like the real thing."

"Even so, it is only an opinion—and an opinion is not good evidence. Why, captain, you couldn't even indict one of those men on the evidence we have got now."

"I guess that's right, too."

"Of course, it's right."

"There is only one thing for me to do," said the coroner. "You can send the body to the morgue whenever you please, captain. It will be the usual verdict: Pistol-shot wound—committed by person or persons unknown, and all that. I'm going home."

He went, too, and presently the detective and the captain were again seated together in the private office.

"I just sent one of the cops around to the hotel where that chap Sterling said he was registered," said the captain. "I want to know if he is there."

"Of course he is there," replied Nick. "That was part of the game."

"How so?"

"Captain, did you study the face of that dead man?" asked Nick.

"Why, yes, a little. Why?"

"How did it impress you?"

"It looked to me like the face of a rounder, Nick."

"Just what do you mean to imply by the term rounder?"

"Oh, you know as well as I do. A highflyer; a hard drinker; a good liver; a fellow who prefers bad company to good company. The sort that plays the races, and the bank, too, when the opportunity offers—and all that."

"But not the sort of rounder who is raised in the streets; eh?"

"No."

"Captain, that dead man was once a part of refinement, and he had considerable of it left with him, too, when he was killed. He has belonged to good people, and he has gone the pace. He has fallen into bad company, or sought it from choice, and that company has somehow succeeded in getting the upper hand of him. I think you will find that there is another crime behind this one, captain."

"Another crime? Eh?"

"Yes. I am strongly of the opinion that if we can establish the identity of the dead man we will find our work in this case much easier."

"That is always the case, isn't it?"

"No; it isn't. It goes without saying that Jasper Carew is not the man's right name."

"Why?"

"Because he carried his cards too prominently. Men of that stamp, when they go to the bad and adopt fictitious names, don't carry their own names around with them, engraved upon fashionable cards."

"Then what did he have the cards for at all, and nothing else?"

"Because, if anything should happen to him, he wished it to be said that it was Jasper Carew who was dead, or arrested for shooting another man; he did not wish it to be doubted—and he took the very way of all others to make it doubted."

"I don't see——"

"Wait a moment, captain."

"Well?"

"First, there was the loaded gun in his pocket, with the two Aoose cartridges, and the rag to clean the gun, if he had to use it; eh?"

"Yes."

"All that suggests that when he started out last night he went prepared for trouble, or in search of it, as I have already said."

"Well?"

"If he happened to shoot another person, he was likely to be arrested; if he was arrested for such an act, he would be searched; eh?"

"Sure thing."

"Well, he laid aside, before he started out, everything that would connect him with any other person than the Jasper Carew he desired to be; and so, if he was arrested and searched at a station house, or if he was shot, as was the case, and his dead body was searched, he would be known only as Jasper Carew. But, in putting aside his papers and letters, and so forth, he overlooked that one pocket which contained the scraps of paper, the laundry ticket, and the note. So you can take it from me, Jasper Carew is not the man's name."

"What was it then?"

"Ah! that is different. But there is one thing that I have noticed, many times, in cases like this one."

"What is it?"

"Men of that stamp, when they take an assumed name, do not haul one down out of the sky, selecting the first one that comes to hand."

"Oh, don't they? I suppose you mean that they follow some sort of a rule, eh?"

"Practically that, yes."

"How do you mean, Nick?"

"Well, seven times out of ten they will select a family name—one that is somewhere in the background, a generation or two—and nine times out of ten they will select a name that has the same initials. They can write it easier."

"That is true."

"I would like to find out just who this man is, and where he came from, captain."

"So would I; but it strikes me that we are wasting valuable time in doing it just now. Those other chaps will be flying the coop in the meantime, Nick."

"I don't think so. Their only safety now depends upon their remaining upon the ground, prepared for whatever may arise. When a man is shot down in the street, as this one was, without a chance for his life, you can safely depend upon it that there is more in the matter than appears on the surface."

"Of course."

"And when such a man has at least four other men trailing him, to see to it that he is put out of the way—four men who are each ready to do the act himself, in case it should become necessary—four men who are there at hand, prepared to assist the assassin to escape, or to prove an alibi, if it is only one of a few feet in distance, you may rest assured that there is a great big conspiracy somewhere behind the act."

"I don't quite see what you are getting at, Nick, but I suppose you do."

"I studied, rather closely, the appearance of those five men who were here, captain."

"So did I, for that matter."

"They impressed me as being slick articles, each in his own line; and crooks, every one of them."

"I'll confess that I did not read them like that, Nick."

"Oh, I don't mean the ordinary run of crooks; I mean the class that is generally known as the respectable crook; the gentleman crook, and all that. An impossible condition, of course, but it expresses what I mean."

"Yes."

"I don't know. I am only drawing upon my imagination, of course—but if I did not have imagination I couldn't be a detective—but I think it will be found in the end that this Jasper Carew was somebody of consequence before he fell in with that bunch, and that they have been working him for all he was worth, along some line which was to their mutual benefit, until he reached a point where he resisted; until they reached a point where he was dangerous to them, and to their interests, and they simply had to put him out of the way. That is the way it looks to me."

"You are mighty vague all the same."

"Because I have nothing else to go upon. But I do not think that the crime that is hidden behind this one—which this one was intended to keep hidden—is of the ordinary sort. The men concerned in it don't answer to that requirement."

"Then what was it, eh?"

"I don't know, captain; but that is precisely what I am going to try to find out."

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN A WEEK HAD PASSED.

Nick Carter's friend, the deputy commissioner, called upon him one night, shortly before midnight, at his house, and the two went to the detective's study, lighted cigars, and fixed themselves for a discussion that had been agreed upon between them for that hour.

The night in question was exactly one week after the murder, as recorded here in the preceding chapters, and during that time Nick Carter and his assistants had been constantly at work upon the case, as also had many detectives of the regular force.

They had worked together, and independently, too; that is, they had worked to the same end, and with no thought of rivalry between them. The rivalry which one time existed in such cases had long since come to an end.

Just what had been accomplished during the week that had passed we will see as we progress.

"Well, Nick," said the commissioner, as he took his seat, "we don't seem to be very much nearer a solution of the Carew case, than when it started; eh?"

"No; we do not."

"Have you changed your opinion about it?"

"Not a bit."

"You still think that either Coyne, or Catlin, did the thing?"

"I do—simply because the circumstances were such that nobody else could have done it."

"Still——"

"If I had not been there on the ground, commissioner, I would not feel as I do, perhaps, and so I can understand why no one else entirely upholds me. I can appreciate why you are now inclined to the belief that I have been wrong, all along. But I was there on the spot, and I say right here and now, that one of those two men, Samuel Catlin, or John Coyne, as we know them now, shot Jasper Carew, as we call him."

"Hold on a minute, Nick."

"Well?"

"Where is your motive?"

"In the secret of Carew's identity, which has not yet been disclosed."

"Well, let's get at that, for a moment."

"Go ahead."

"The clothing that Carew wore when he was killed was supplied by a Rochester firm to a clothier in the city of Washington; a clerk in that store said that he sold the clothes to a man named Carew, who gave his address in East Capitol Street."

"Yes."

"I sent one of my men to the house in East Capitol Street, in Washington, with a photograph of Carew, and the people there identified it as the picture of a Mr. Carew who had had a room in the house for a month which ended about a week before the man was shot, here in New York."

"All right. What of that?"

"Wait a minute."

"Well?"

"One of my men located the Chinese laundryman, in Washington, who supplied the red ticket that was found in Carew's clothes. He did not know the name of the man, but he recognized the photograph as that of a former customer, and easily led my man to the house at which he had called for and delivered laundry. It was the same house."

"Yes."

"We inquired of the postmen along that street. They remembered the name of Carew, and that they had delivered letters to such a man at that address. They could recall two of the postmarks on the letters they had delivered: Boston and New York."

"Yes."

"I had the telegraph records searched at each of the main offices in Washington, and one telegram was found that had been sent to Jasper Carew, at that address. It was sent from Providence, Rhode Island, and was signed 'Poster.' And in one of Carew's pockets you found, the night of the murder, a memorandum which mentioned that name, if it is a name."

"Yes."

"I looked up the long distance records in Washington, at the telephone main office, with the help of the general manager. We found that one long-distance call had been sent to Carew, at the house in East Capitol Street. The record said that a Mr. Poster desired to speak to Mr. Jasper Carew—and they talked together fifteen minutes; that was the time charge against the call, and the call came from Providence."

"Go on."

"Neither of us has been able to find that Carew had a place to stay in New York. He had not registered at any hotel, and we have not been able to find any other address; and so we are forced to the conclusion that he had only arrived in New York on that day, that he had been absent from Washington only a week, and that he may have spent the intervening time almost anywhere.

"He was known as Carew, in Washington; he was known as Carew by people in New York, in Boston, and in Providence; and so, if Carew was not his right name, it is reasonably certain that he had made use of it long enough to have established some identity with it."

"Sure. I am not questioning that, commissioner; I am merely still firm in the opinion that those men killed him, and that the killing had something to do with his lost identity."

"I know. Well, I have tried to find out where he went during that week before he was killed, when we lose track of him. I have had the hotel registers of Boston, Providence, Philadelphia, and Baltimore searched; nothing doing, Nick. I have sent copies of his pictures, broadcast, all over the country, and reproductions of them have been printed in the papers, all over the country. Nothing doing. If he had another identity, he managed to lose it pretty thoroughly before he was killed."

Nick nodded; then he asked a question.

"How many identifications have you had of him, other than you have already named, in reply to the pictures as they have appeared in various places?" he asked.

"Five. Three from Washington; two, here in New York."

"What were they?"

"From people who said in the main—from Washington, that is—that the picture strongly resembled a man they had seen, but did not know, whose name was Carew, and who lived at one time in East Capitol Street. Just the ordinary letter of that sort."

"And the two from New York?"

"Both bartenders, who knew him as Carew, over the bar."

"Somewhere, there is somebody who knew him better than any of those people you have mentioned, commissioner."

"Of course; but we can't find that somebody; and I have exhausted every resource."

Nick tapped his pencil upon the desk in front of him thoughtfully.

"If he had been a nondescript-looking chap, it would not be so strange," he said, at last. "But he was not. He had been handsome, and was still so, if the dissipation had not been so evident."

"Well, I haven't been able, yet, to find out who else he was, besides Jasper Carew. Something may turn up later; but just now that is how it stands. Now, let's touch upon the Catlin and Coyne end of it."

"Well?"

"You still insist that one of those two men committed the murder, and that two of the others—Heckman and Sterling, were accomplices."

"Yes; or, to put it more plainly and directly, I still insist that nobody but one of the first two—Coyne and Catlin—could have done it, as it was done, and at the time it was accomplished; and I am morally certain that Heckman was an accomplice, and that Sterling was probably one, also."

"Well, there again there is nothing in the facts to uphold your view of the case."

"I know that."

"Coyne, it is true, has no visible means of support, but seems to be fairly well supplied with money all the time. Not overmuch, but enough for his needs. He lives in a rear room of a house in West Thirty-fourth Street, and has lived there ten years. That speaks rather well for him."

"On the face of it; yes."

"His habits, so far as I have been able to learn, are fairly good; not too good, and not bad. He never goes to his room till two or three or four in the morning, and he never leaves it till noon of the following day. Then he goes to his breakfast; then he lounges around the hotels, drinks a little, plays billiards every day of his life, and seems to be known in the rooms where he plays; speaks, casually, of a small income which is sufficient for his needs, and all that. What can you find against him in that, Nick?"

"Not a thing; but it does not alter my opinion as to the crime."

"Coyne keeps a saloon here in New York—he calls it a café—in Broadway, uptown, as you know. You have been there."

"Yes."

"Nobody there ever heard of Carew; nobody there, his bartenders or his patrons, recognized the picture of Carew, as a man they had ever seen—so it is a safe proposition that Carew was not in the habit of going there, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And he would have been likely to go there, once, at least, if he and Coyne were so well known to each other, that they sought each other's lives."

"Perhaps."

"Coyne has had that same saloon three years, and kept another on Third Avenue, before he bought out that place. He drinks a lot, but is rarely the worse for liquor, and he runs what is called a respectable place. There is a back room to it, as there is to all places in that part of the town; but that is about all. There is nothing against him."

"No."

"Heckman is the proprietor of exactly the same sort of a place, in Boston. He comes to New York three or four times a year, just for fun, as he expresses it. I know of a thousand other men who do the same thing."

"So do I."

"The police of Boston cannot dig up anything in particular against the man, Nick."

"No. I understand that. And it is the same with Sterling, who lives in Providence, and who is an undertaker."

"I can't find a thing against Sterling, Nick. He seems a respectable business man; he has a fine undertaking shop; he is well spoken of in the vicinity, and has a good-sized bank account. His credit is A one where he lives. And the other man, Sturges, is a veterinary surgeon, with an office on Ninth Avenue. I can't find anything for or against him. He appears to be just an everyday fellow, who has enough business to keep him going, and who boozes a little at times. That covers the lot, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, suppose you talk a little while. See what you have to say about it, Nick."

"All right. But I haven't much."

"I know. But, go ahead."

CHAPTER IX.

SEARCHING FOR A CLEW.

"I'll go back to the night of the murder, commissioner," said the detective.

"Yes. We haven't seen each other since then. Two of my men who went out with your assistants that night helped them in a little trick that they played, but it wasn't productive, was it?"

"You refer to the pickpocket business?" Nick asked, with a smile.

"Yes."

"You know all about that. You had your own report about it, of course."

"Surely. But what was the idea?"

"I felt certain that I would get the pistol with which the shooting was done, that is all."

"Oho; you didn't tell me that."

"Chick and Patsy, and your men, acted the part of mere spectators at the station house, who had just blown in to see what was going on; they got acquainted with the five men who interested me. They left the station house with them—and they went through their pockets before they left them."

"I know. I know. And they took a loaded gun from every man of them, too. That is the only thing that I have thought counted against them, Nick; and yet, nine men out of ten will pack a gun with them nowadays, if they are out late at night."

"But, the point is," said Nick, "that they were satisfied with taking one gun from each man, when it is possible that at least one of them might have had two."

"I don't see it. Not one of the guns taken had been used."

"That is just the point. The gun that had been used that night was not taken. It was concealed somewhere about the person who used it—Coyne or Catlin—and Chick and Patsy were satisfied in taking one gun, believing each time they felt one that it was the one that was wanted."

"I think you are a trifle off on that subject, Nick."

"It may be that I am; but you know, when I get an idea of this sort, that amounts almost to an inspiration, I stick to it."

"I see that you do."

"Danny, whom I had searching the neighborhood for a gun that had been thrown away, found nothing; therefore, the murderer carried it away with him. He did not have time to dispose of it, or, what is more likely, he had a place upon his person to dispose of it for the time being, which he considered safer."

"Oh, well, have it that way if you want to. What next?"

"I'll tell you what I propose to do next in just a moment. But there is something that I wish you would have done, just to please me, commissioner."

"Of course I will. What is it?"

"You have got a little chap down at the Central Office—one of your new men—named Dan Royle, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"I know something about Dan. He is a good man in the profession, and is just the one I would like to have you detail to this job I am about to suggest."

"All right. Consider it done then."

"Thank you. I have been to the power house of the electrical company which supplies the lights where they were turned off for a short time that night—I am not digressing; I will get back to Dan Royle in a moment."

"Very well."

"The lights went out for a short interval that night by reason of an accident that is likely to happen at any time in any power house, commissioner. There was nothing remarkable about it, and every employee there knew all about it; that is, knew all about how it did happen."

"I understand."

"The dynamos which supply that particular circuit were in charge of a man named Gebbe that night, and at that particular time. I saw Gebbe, and he explained the occurrence to me himself—and he did it in an offhand manner that showed conclusively that it was an occurrence that might happen at any time."

"Well?"

"The very fact that it could happen at any time, by accident, is sufficient proof that it might also happen at any time, through design, commissioner."

"Eh? What do you mean by that, Nick?"

"Understand me, I am not saying that this man Gebbe is a criminal, or is in league with criminals; but —some men are exceedingly plausible; Mr. Charles J. Heckman, of Boston, for example. He struck me as being about the most plausible man I have encountered in some time."

"I'm still in the dark."

"That is what I think Heckman wanted, that night, commissioner," said Nick, with a smile; "to be in the dark for a moment; and he got what he wanted, too."

"Do you mean that you think he bribed Gebbe?"

"Yes. Just that. But don't misunderstand me. I don't suppose for an instant that Gebbe had any idea that a crime was to be committed while he did as he was probably asked to do. No doubt he was given to understand that it was a joke, and that he was to assist in it."

"Go on. It is rather far-fetched, though."

"Not so far-fetched, as you express it, as that the lights should go out at precisely the instant Heckman and the others wished them to. There was an appointed moment for the meeting between Carew and one of the four men we are talking about; the note taken from Carew's pocket proves that."

"Well?"

"When I saw Carew and another man walking together toward me, they had certainly been walking together as much as half a minute, or a minute. The man who was with Carew killed him, and he went there for the express purpose of killing him. There was no sign of a disturbance between the two, and I saw them. I would have noticed it, if there had been. They were apparently walking along quietly together—and they must have seen me approaching them."

"Well?"

"If we admit that the other man went there with the express intention of shooting Carew, he would probably have done it the moment they met, or certainly the instant he saw me approaching, and while there was still distance enough away from me for him to escape—unless he had expected the lights to go out."

"Oh; I see what you mean. He was killing time till the lights went out. That is your idea?"

"Yes."

"There might be something in that, if you can explain how it was accomplished, Nick."

"I can explain how I would have accomplished such a thing."

"All right."

"First, I would ascertain which power house controlled that light circuit."

"Yes."

"Second, I would secure a permit—it can be done easily enough if one goes about it in the right way—to visit that power house, and go through it; and I would ask a heap of questions about the different circuits that radiated from it, how they were turned on and off, and all about it. See?"

"Yes."

"Third, I would manage to get a moment alone with the man who had control of that circuit. Do you happen to know that there are very few men on duty at a time, to run a power house like that?"

"Yes. Go on."

"Fourth, I would say to him that I'd mightily like to spring a joke on some friends of mine that night. I would wonder if it could be arranged for the lights to go out, suddenly, about half-past two in the morning, and to remain out just a few seconds. I would suggest that I could win a small bet, and play a splendid joke, if it could be worked—and I would hand that man a twenty-dollar bill."

"Which he would probably throw at you."

"Some men would do so; others would not. Most would look at it the second time before they threw it, and, looking, would be lost. I would assure the man that the twenty dollars bound him to nothing, and that he need not feel that he must turn off the lights at the time I suggested; but all the same, if anything should happen that they did go out for a few seconds that night, right after half-past two o'clock, I would see that he received a second twenty dollars, just like that one. And then I'd walk away laughing. Commissioner, nine men out of ten would fall for it."

"Some would."

"This man Gebbe is that sort, if I can read character."

"Why do you think so?"

"He is the sort of man who would say at the start that he would not dare to do it. After I had gone he would get to looking at that bill, and wonder what he would do with the forty dollars, if he had another one just like it. He would think of a lot of things he could buy, that he wanted to get, and perhaps that he had been saving up for; and he would keep on thinking about it till the time came to do it—and then, upon impulse, knowing that the night was a fine one, he would do it."

"Maybe."

"Well, anyway, I want you to send Dan Royle to see that man."

"And do what?"

"Offer him the other twenty dollars."

"How do you know it was twenty, Nick?"

'I don't know it was twenty. It might have been fifty, or only ten; but there is one thing that I am dead certain about."

"What is that?"

"That the briber would not send it to the man at the power house, after the murder, no matter what the amount might be."

"You're right about that."

"And if he did not send it, Gebbe would be sore."

"Sure; but he would also be scared about that murder; he would have read about it in the papers, of course."

"That is just where Dan's work comes in. Heckman, naturally, would not have told Gebbe his name; but Gebbe would remember his face. I have got a good snapshot picture of Heckman that Patsy took the next day after the murder. Dan could show him that, and he could say that the man had sent him with some money that he had promised."

"It might work—if the thing is true."

"It will work if the thing is true, and I believe it is true. At all events, even if it were not Heckman who did the bribing, if there was any bribery at all, Gebbe would betray himself to Dan. Dan should represent that his principle is very greatly shocked over the fact that a crime was committed as the result of his harmless joke, and can offer Gebbe an additional sum of money to keep silent about his connection with the matter, as if he only felt himself to blame, and did not blame Gebbe at all. Oh, it can be done, all right, and Dan Royle is the one who can do it."

CHAPTER X.

THE SUGGESTION OF A CLEW.

"Now, commissioner," said the detective, resuming, "if you will have Dan Royle attend to that matter, about as I have outlined it, I will give my attention to the other end of the case."

"To the Carew end, I suppose you mean, Nick?"

"Yes."

"I'll put Royle onto the job, all right, and just on the lines you have suggested. I do not deny that it will be somewhat of a feather in your cap, if that Gebbe chap should recognize the picture of Heckman, for instance; and, by the way, you had better give that to me now, before it is forgotten."

"Here it is."

"Thank you. But, Nick, if somebody did go there to seduce Gebbe into turning off the lights after the manner you suggest, it might as well have been Sterling, or any of the others, as Heckman."

"Perhaps so; but the fact remains that if there is a leader among those fellows—one to whom the rest deferred in matters of this sort, it is Heckman. Still—you may as well take these pictures also. There is one of Sterling, one of each of the others, in fact."

"That is better."

"I would suggest that Dan use the Heckman picture first, and, after that, if it does not work, Sterling's; then Catlin's, and last of all, Coyne's."

"Have you eliminated Sturges entirely from consideration?"

"No. The doctor, as he calls himself, may be the man, after all."

"Now, what are you going to do, Nick?"

"I shall take the morning train for Washington. I shall go to that house in East Capitol Street. I shall visit the clothier's and the laundry, and I shall do a little questioning on my own account. This is not a criticism of your men; it is only an idea that I may be able to ask some questions that did not occur to them."

"But what do you propose to accomplish by it?"

"I want to associate Carew with somebody. No man is so utterly alone in the world that he has no associates at all. Carew must have had some, somewhere."

"Naturally."

"He was a man who drank, and who drank a good deal, too. If I could read the signs in his face right he played the ponies, too, if he got a chance; and the bank. With two or three of those pictures of him in my pocket, each giving a different view of his face, I ought to be able to run across somebody down there who has seen him. I have always found that it is a good deal easier to trace a man forward from a given point than it is to follow the back trail."

"That is so, all right."

"And now, commissioner, what will you do here, in addition to carrying out the suggestion in regard to Gebbe?"

"Make another suggestion, Nick, and let's see if we agree."

"You have already got shadows on the men, haven't you?"

"Sure thing; and I change them off every day. The man who is shadowing Coyne to-day, will be on Catlin's track to-morrow, and on Sturges' the next day;

and I have got two men in Providence looking after Sterling, and two more in Boston looking out for Heckman, to say nothing of the fact that the local police in both places are helping all they can."

"So you do believe in my theory after all, eh?" asked the detective, with a smile.

"I have never said that I did not. As you said a little while ago, you were there, on the spot, when the thing happened; I was not."

"Billy"—the detective sometimes called his friend by that name—"I am just as sure that either Catlin or Coyne committed that murder, as I am positive that you are seated upon that chair in front of me; and I want to prove it."

"So do I—if it can be proven."

"There is proof somewhere, and we can find it if we don't get impatient. Only a week has passed since the murder was committed."

"Oh, I'm not impatient; I am only eager."

"I don't suppose you are going back to headquarters from here, are you?"

"Yes, I am, as it happens. Why?"

"Have you got any extra copies of the pictures of Carew down there?"

"Plenty of them. Why?"

"I want a few—let me see—— How many trains a day are there between here and Washington, if you know?"

"Eleven; six on one road, and five on the other, each way."

"Well, then I will want about a dozen or fifteen of the best pictures you have of Carew."

"I'm on, Nick. For the conductors, eh?"

"No; not exactly; for the Pullman porters—or for one of them to distribute for me, and to pass the word along that a cash prize goes with the information that may be forthcoming. For, you see, there is just one thing that we are sure about, in regard to Carew. He did come to New York from Washington some time during the week that expired one week ago to-day."

"Sure thing."

"He was the sort of a chap who would ride in a Pullman, I think. If he gave his porter a substantial tip that porter would remember him; if he gave the porter no tip at all, or a very small one, that porter would remember him. He was probably full, or half full, too, and sick rather close to the buffet car, and was unusual often; therefore, that particular porter received no tip and would remember him. Now, another thing, Billy."

"All right."

"Just before you came I was looking over the list of articles taken from Carew's clothing the night of the murder. Here it is. I will read it over to you."

"Go ahead."

"If any of the articles I mention suggests anything to you, interrupt me, will you?"

"Yes."

The detective read aloud, as follows:

"Coat; right side pocket; handkerchief, folded, no mark upon it; box of cigarettes, two missing; silver match safe, unmarked."

"That suggests that he may have been left-handed, Nick. A man usually carries his handkerchief in the off-hand pocket, I have found."

The detective nodded, and read on:

"Left side pocket: pair of kid gloves, much worn; card of matches. Breast pocket: four coupons of a cigar company. Inside pocket: nothing. Change pocket: three dimes, two nickels, and a Yale key; probably a door key. Vest; right side upper pocket: two pencils, fountain pen, a blank card."

"Again there is the suggestion of being left-handed, Nick. A right-handed man would carry his pencils in the opposite pocket; eh?"

Nick nodded again, and read on:

"Right side, lower pocket: several wood toothpicks; one quill toothpick; red laundry ticket, Chinese; slip of paper containing notation, 'Poster, at five. Thirtieth;' two slips of paper covered with meaningless figures; one slip of paper containing a written message as follows"—and then followed the note we have already read. "A washington street-car ticket. Left side, upper pocket: nothing. Lower pocket, watch, gold-filled case"—and there followed a full description of the watch, its number, etc. "Inside pocket: nothing.

"Trousers; fob pocket: twenty-dollar gold piece. Right-hand pocket: roll of bills containing sixty dollars. Left-hand pocket: small change amounting to ninety-three cents; one desk key, made double, evidently for a roll-top desk. Hip pockets; right side: soiled handkerchief, no mark. Left side: a key ring containing three Yale keys; bulldog pattern, thirty-eight caliber revolver, fully loaded, clean, ready for use; two loose cartridges to fit the gun; one piece of rag, evidently to wipe gun after using. That is all there was in the pockets, commissioner. Does it suggest anything?"

"Only the idea that the man was left-handed."

"Oh, I think there was no doubt of that. But I don't see how the fact is to help me; do you?"

"No. It isn't important. There is just one thing there, Nick, that might be an idea, after all."

"What is it?"

"That bunch of three keys. Have you looked at them?"

"Yes."

"Are they genuine Yale keys?"

"Yes. Why?"

"It isn't very far from here to Stamford, Nick, where the factory is located that makes the Yale keys. Now, the Yale people boast that they do not make two locks alike. I wonder if they keep any sort of a record there of the locks and keys that are turned out, and if they have a method of tracing such things? Eh?"

"By Jove, commissioner, I shouldn't wonder. Anyhow, there is always an expert in such a place who 'knows it all,' down to the ground, and from the ground up again."

"I think I'll get those keys, Nick, and take a trip to Stamford, while you are away."

"Do it, Billy."

"Will you come down to headquarters before you start in the morning, or shall I send those pictures to you?"

"Send one of the men to meet me at the Pennsylvania Station for the six-o'clock train."

"Done. And that is all, for to-night, isn't it?"

"Yes; unless you can think of something else."

"You haven't told me what Chick and Patsy are doing on the case—or don't you want to tell just yet?"

"Sure. Chick is in Boston, working on the back record of Heckman—and, meanwhile, making a search of the photograph galleries all through the city."

"The photograph galleries? For what?"

"To see if he can find a picture in any of them that suggests the face of Jasper Carew."

"Not a bad idea; but why Boston? Why not Washington? or New York? or Providence?"

"Well, Patsy is doing the same thing in Providence, while he looks up the back record of Mr. Oscar Sterling—and the answer to the rest of your question is that I have an idea, and have had it all along, that Heckman has been the 'black beast' in this affair from the start—and he comes from Boston; belongs there, you know; and Sterling is next on the list, in my estimation. We are all in the dark, you know, and we have got to work in the dark."

"I see."

"New York is rather too big to search all the photo galleries; and Washington was only a temporary stopping place for Carew, or I miss my guess."

"Is that why you are going there yourself?" asked the commissioner smilingly.

"Yes. I know Washington pretty thoroughly, and so do you. You know that a man can't sneeze down there that somebody does not report to a neighbor that he has a cold. I am only going there, anyhow, to try to trace Carew's movements after he left there. He must have known somebody. He was a sociable sort of a chap, if I could read that dead face of his at all."

"Well, good luck to you—and good night."

CHAPTER XI.

THE HIDDEN TRAIL.

On the train on the way to Washington Nick Carter called the porter to him when the opportunity offered.

"You have been on this run a long time, haven't you?" he asked of the negro. "I seem to remember having ridden with you before."

"Yes, sir. I have been here four years and over," was the ready reply, made with a broad grin. "I remember your face very well, sir."

"And your name?"

"Cæsar Johnson, sir."

"Well, Cæsar, I am going to give you a good, substantial tip before I leave your car; and there is something that I want done for me, which I think you can do, without interfering with your work. If you can do it, and will do it, and succeed in what I ask, I will give you a nice new crisp twenty-dollar bill for it. I suppose you would like to earn that, eh?"

"Yes, indeed, sir."

"Well, first, I am Nick Carter, the detective. Now, I——"

"Say, sir, you don't mean to tell me that you are the great detective of that name, do you?"

"Yes, Cæsar."

"Well, sir, who'd have thought it. Of course, I will do anything in the world for you that I can do, sir."

"Here are three pictures of the same man, taken in different positions, Cæsar," said the detective. "I want you to take a good look at them, first, and tell me if you think you had that man as a passenger with you lately; last week, say; or the week before."

"No, sir. I doesn't remember the gentleman," was the instant reply, after he had looked at the pictures.

"Well, now listen to what I want you to do."

"Yes, sir."

"Put those pictures into one of your pockets. When we get to Washington, I want you to make it your business to see every porter who runs in and out of Washington, on both of the roads. You can see the other porters on this train before we get there."

"Yes, sir."

"It may take you two or three days to see and talk with all the others, but I want you to manage to see each one of them, personally. Can you do that?"

"Yes, sir, within a few days I can."

"Well, to the best of my information at present, that man traveled from Washington to New York—or toward New York, for he may have left the train before he got there—during the week that came to an end one week ago the day before yesterday. Have you got that in your mind, Cæsar?"

"Yes, sir."

"He was generally known at that time by the name of Carew—Mr. Jasper Carew—but that is probably not his real name. See?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want to find that man. I want to locate him. You may tell the porters, to whom you talk, that if any of them succeed in placing the man for me, it is worth a ten spot to him—and that will not be included in your pay."

"Thank you, sir."

"That is all. When you get the information, telephone to me, or come to my house in New York and see me. Here is my card, with the telephone number written on it. The picture is a fairly good one—only I may as well tell you now that the man is dead, and I only wish to find out who he really was. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"I tell you that so you will understand that you will not be helping to send the man to prison, although I have no doubt that he ought to have gone there before he died. That is all, Cæsar."

In Washington, when the detective left the train, he called Cæsar to him again.

"I shall probably be in Washington until late to-morrow afternoon, or evening," he said. "If you should find out anything before that time, come to see me at the Arlington, or wire me there."

Half an hour later the detective was ringing the bell at the house in East Capitol Street where Carew was known to have stayed.

"Madam," he said to the landlady, putting copies of the photographs into her hand, "you have already been questioned several times in regard to the original of those photographs, and I suppose you are weary of the subject. I don't know whether you have been told, or not, that the man is dead; but he is. I am seeking only to identify him, for I am convinced that Jasper Carew was not his right name. Will you help me?"

"Yes, sir, if I can; but I don't know anything more about him than I have already told," was the reply.

"Will you call the maid who took care of the room he occupied, in this house?"

"Certainly. One moment;" and she went to the door and called—"Sar-raaah? Saar-ah?"

Sarah came almost at once—a good-looking, light-complexioned negro girl who was plainly of the intelligent order.

"Sarah," said the detective, "I want to ask you a few questions, and I will pay you for answering them. You remember Mr. Carew, of course?"

"Yes, sir. I have been asked about him before."

"Of course. Were you told that he is dead?"

"No, sir. I'm sorry. He was a real nice gentleman, and very liberal."

"I am glad to hear that; glad to know that you respected him, Sarah. I want you to help me to find out who he really was, and so, I want you to try to remember every little thing about him that you can."

"Yes, sir."

"When you were clearing up his room while he was here, or right after he had gone away, did you find any scrap of paper, any old envelope, or anything of that kind, that he had left, or forgotten, that you remember?"

"No, sir. He was the neatest man in a room that I ever saw, sir. He never left a thing littered around it. Another person might have come right into it after he went away, it was that neat and clean."

"Did you look out for his laundry, Sarah?"

"Yas, sir. The other men asked me that. There wasn't any marks on it, only the regular laundry marks, that I remember."

"Did he ever send you out on an errand, while he was here?"

"No, sir."

"Did he ever leave any message with you to be given to another person who might call, whether that person called or not?"

"Once, sir."

"When was that, and what was it?"

"Two or three days before he went away, it was; I don't remember just the day. He went out about noon that day, and when he was going he called to me and told me that a gentleman might call upon him, and if anybody did, I was to say that he had gone to New York. But nobody called to get the message, and I told him so when he returned that night."

"What time did he return?"

"About nine o'clock, sir, I think it was."

"And do you know where he went, when he was out?"

"No, sir. He never told me."

"Didn't he ever leave word with you where he could be found if anybody should call?"

"No, sir."

"When he went away for good, did he tell you where he was going?"

"To New York."

"You are sure about that, Sarah?"

"Yes, sir."

"I notice that there are two messenger-call boxes in the hall here, and a telephone. Now, while Mr. Carew was here, did he ever use either one of those boxes, or the telephone?"

"Yes, sir. I know that he used one of the boxes twice. And the day he went away he used the telephone twice, too."

"Have you been asked these questions before?"

"No, sir."

"Did you notice what calls he gave, over the telephone, either time."

"Both times I heard the calls, sir, but I didn't take no notice except that they were something—Columbia."

"That was the day he left here. Now, what day was that?"

"It was a week ago last Monday," said the landlady, now interested, and replying for the maid.

"Thank you. That would have been the nineteenth. Now, Sarah, while he was here, was there any call for him over the telephone, that you remember? Or, did any messenger ever come here with a letter, or a package, or with any sort of a message for him?"

"Both, sir."

"Tell me about both."

"There was a long-distance phone for him one day, but I don't know anything about it, only that. Then, both times that he called a messenger, the messenger returned after Mr. Carew had sent him away, and brought a package each time. Once the package seemed very heavy, and the other time it was light, and larger. I carried them both to his room to him, while the messenger waited in the hall, and he went down each time to sign for the packages. That is all I know about it, sir."

"Can you remember just what days those were, when he used the messenger service?"

"Yes, sir. The same day that he used the telephone to call up some number, Columbia."

"And that was two or three days before he went away. Now, if he went away on Monday, we ought to succeed in fixing the day. Was it Sunday? You should remember that much?"

"No, sir. I am sure that it wasn't Sunday, because the——"

"Never mind why, if you are sure about it. Was it Saturday? Try to think what you were doing at the time you know he used the telephone, and that will help you to fix the day."

"Why, I remember now, sir. I was brushing down the stairs. It was Friday, of course."

"Of course. That would have been the sixteenth. Now, what time of day was it?"

"Well, sir, I was on the second flight up, the first time he called, and that would have been about nine in the morning, sir. I always wait till the gentlemen get out of the house before I begin to brush down the stairs, and I had worked down that far—and the second time he called on the phone would have been about half an hour, or maybe an hour, later."

"So, it is safe to say that both calls were turned in between nine and eleven, in the morning of the sixteenth, Sarah?"

"Yes, sir."

"What kind of baggage did he have when he went away from here."

"Just a small, sole-leather trunk. He didn't have any bag."

"Who took the trunk away from here for him? And were there any marks on the trunk that you remember?"

"He went away in a hack that was driven by a colored man, and took the trunk with him; and I only remember one mark that was on it, sir, although there were lots of pasters of hotels. The mark that I remember looked as if a bottle of red ink had been spilled on the top of the trunk, and as if somebody had tried to scrape the ink off with a knife, or a piece of glass."

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRUNK WITH THE RED STAIN.

Nick went from the house in East Capitol Street directly to police headquarters, and to see the chief.

"Major," he said, "you can help me in something that I want to do, and I know beforehand that you will be willing to do so—if you can spare one or two of your men for a couple of hours?"

"Certainly, Carter; if it is something in our line."

"It is the case of Carew, major."

"Well?"

"On the nineteenth of this month Carew called a hack to the house in East Capitol Street where he had been staying. The driver was a negro. He took Carew and a sole-leather trunk away from that house; a small trunk that bore a lot of hotel labels upon it, and that was stained on the top by a blotch of red ink—or blood—which had been partially scraped off. I want to find the man who did that, or, at least, I want to know all that he can tell about that trip, where he took the man and the trunk, and what became of them. I want to leave Washington as soon as possible, too. How soon do you think you can have the information for me?"

"Was it a public hack?"

"Yes."

"Then I ought to know about it inside of three or four hours."

"Very good. I will return here at five o'clock this afternoon; and thank you."

Nick hurried to the main office of the telephone company. He asked for the general manager, and sent in his card to him. He was admitted at once. Nick ben of the telephone at the house in East Capitol had already written down on a slip of paper the num- Street.

"Mr. Magoon," he said, "between nine and eleven o'clock, the morning of the nineteenth, two calls were given in from that telephone, for a number, or for two different numbers, on the Columbia exchange. Will you find out what numbers they were, and give me the addresses of the houses—as soon as possible? It's a police case, of course."

"Certainly, sir; it will take about fifteen or twenty minutes."

"I will wait," said Nick.

At the end of seventeen minutes, precisely, the manager returned with the following information:

"There are the telephone numbers, Mr. Carter," he said; "also the street addresses you wanted. There are two of them, and both saloons, as you see—on Fifteenth Street."

"I see. Thank you." Outside he said to himself: "No use going to either of those places; at least, not now. The calls were arranged, doubtless, and some one was waiting in those saloons for the calls. The people there would know nothing about them; or, if they did know, would not tell. I won't bother with them."

He sought the office of the messenger service.

In something of the same manner he explained his wants, and the whole machinery of the office was set in motion at once to discover the facts. Within half an hour both the messenger boys who had served that house call on the sixteenth of the month, presented themselves before the detective; and their reports, in each case, was the same, in effect.

The first one had been given this direction:

He was to go to the corner of Thirteenth and F Streets, and was to stand there, with a handkerchief tied around his right arm, until a man approached him who was to ask him if he was sent there by Mr. Jasper Carew. Upon his reply that he was, the man had given him a heavy package, that must have weighed ten pounds or more, the boy thought, with instructions to deliver it to Mr. Carew. That was all there was about that.

The second messenger had been directed by Carew to wait at the corner of Seventeenth and H Streets, where the cars turn the corner, also with a handkerchief tied around his right arm, was to reply to the same question, and was to deliver a package in the same manner; this time the package was larger, but not so heavy; was quite light in weight, as compared with the other one. That was all there was of that.

"Nothing doing," the detective told himself, as he left the office of the messenger service. He hurried back to police headquarters, arriving there almost an hour sooner than he had said; but the major was ready for him, nevertheless.

"I think I have got all the information you want, Carter," he said, "but there is the name of the driver, and where he can be found, if you wish to question him yourself. He was picked up on the avenue—Pennsylvania Avenue—the day before, and told to call at the house in East Capitol Street at two in the afternoon, the next day. He went there, got the trunk and the man, and drove them to the Union Station. He remembers the trunk as you described it to me. He delivered it at the baggage room of the station. He knows nothing about the man or where he went to, after arriving at the station."

Nick went to the station at once. It was not so long after the same hour of the day when the trunk had gone there that he would not find the same men on duty at the baggage room; and he did. Nick asked for the man in charge, and found him. He began by passing over a two-dollar bill; then he said:

"On the nineteenth—a week ago last Monday—a negro hack driver brought to this room a small sole-

leather trunk covered with foreign labels, and which had a stain on the top of it that might have been made with red ink, or with blood. The stain had been scraped off partially, with a knife, or a piece of glass. That isn't much to remember a trunk by, but here is a picture of the man who checked the trunk to some destination. See if you, or one of your men, can fit the two things together, and tell me to what place that trunk was checked. Another two-dollar bill goes with that one when I get the information."

The baggage master called his men around him. He talked with them earnestly for a time and showed the photographs which Nick had placed in his hands. After a few moments he returned to Nick, accompanied by one of his men, who said:

"I checked that trunk, sir, for that man. I remember both very well, for the reason that one of the labels on the trunk was from the Morgenstrasse Hotel in Berlin, where I used to work when I was a boy. I remember the face of the man, too, sir. He checked the trunk to Boston, and it left here on the Colonial Express the next day; and he had a ticket on that train, too, because I punched it when I checked the trunk."

Nick thanked the man, gave him the extra money he had promised, and walked away—and he took the five-o'clock train for New York, too, having still time to telephone to the Arlington Hotel to find out if there was any message there for him. He had accomplished all that could be done in Washington, in less than five hours of time.

At eleven o'clock that night he was in his own house, having just arrived there; and he used the telephone at once, calling up police headquarters, and asking for his friend, the deputy commissioner.

"Our man went from Washington direct to Boston, it would seem, Billy," he said. "At all events, he bought a ticket for Boston, and had his trunk checked there. I have already sent a wire to Chick to search Heckman's house, and any other place he can think of, for such a trunk, and I have a very good description of it. Your men did not go deep enough into the inquiry, in Washington. They forgot about telephones and messenger boys and so forth. But that doesn't matter now. Have you heard any report from Dan Royle?"

"Dan is here now," replied the commissioner, who had listened without a word. "He has brought that fellow Gebbe with him. It seems that you were right about Heckman, after all. He was at the power house that day—the day before the murder, and he did try to induce Gebbe to switch off the lights for a few seconds, at half-past two that night. But Gebbe swears that the man did not offer him any money, and that the going out of the lights was purely an accident—and the strange part of it is that I believe him. It was a coincidence, that is all—and a very strange one. But the attitude of Gebbe, and his eagerness to face the man who was there, convinces me that he is telling the truth. Odd, isn't it?"

"Yes. What have you done about it?"

"I called up Boston and asked for the arrest of Heckman at once. But he has disappeared. He is not there, and has not been seen around his place since yesterday morning. He may have come to New York again, and I have got half a dozen men out looking for him."

"Put out a dozen, commissioner."

"All right. I'll get him, if he is in town."

"Get Sterling, too, in Providence."

"My dear fellow, I have got Sterling and Catlin and Coyne and even Sturges, all here now, under lock and key. One of my men, who was at the station house the night of the murder, met him on the street here to-day, and took him in, half an hour after I had sent to Providence for him."

"What charge did you make against him, commissioner?"

"I took the bull by the horns, Nick."

"How so? What do you mean?"

"I made an affidavit on information and belief, and charged the whole bunch with complicity in the murder of Jasper Carew—and I have not let any one of them know that any other one of the outfit has been arrested, either."

"Good."

"But I doubt very much if we have evidence enough to hold them," said the commissioner.

"We'll get it, before we have to let any of them go. I sent the same sort of a message to Patsy, in Providence, that I sent to Chick, in Boston. The trunk is the thing."

"I suppose so. Did you find out anything about Carew?"

"No; no more than I have told you. The next thing is to get Heckman."

"We'll get him all right. I feel certain that he is here in New York. The fact that Sterling was here, and had just arrived, indicates that those men were to meet here for one purpose or another, doesn't it?"

"It looks so."

"What shall I do with Gebbe? Shall I keep him here a while? Do you want to talk to him, Nick?"

"No. You have got all the information out of him that is wanted, I expect. You say that the lights did go out by accident, so let it go at that. We can find Gebbe when we want him, and we won't want him till Heckman is arrested. Then he will be wanted to identify the man, and to tell what Heckman said to him about the lights. It is only circumstancial evidence of a very remote class, but it may help. Let Gebbe go back to work. It is nearly midnight now, and I suppose he is due there, eh?"

"Yes. He got off for a couple of hours to come down here with Royle."

"All right. Let him go back. But say?"

"Well?"

"If Heckman is in town, to meet Catlin and the others, Sterling included, won't he take the alarm if he does not find them at the meeting place, wherever it is?"

"I have thought of that. Yes, I think he will, and,

if he does, that he will beat it for Boston again on the first train out; so I have got men at the station looking for him."

"All right. If you will wait for me at headquarters, I think I will go right down there now."

"I'll wait. We will have Catlin and Coyne up here in my room, and maybe we can get something out of them."

"Possibly."

As the detective left the house to go to headquarters, he said to his man Joseph:

"I want you to wait up to-night, Joseph, and listen for the telephone, to receive a message from Chick or Patsy. If anything comes, call me up at headquarters."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HIDDEN CRIME.

When Nick Carter walked into the office of the deputy commissioner, half an hour later, he found that official in conversation with one of his men, to whom he was giving some explicit directions; but he stopped long enough to turn and greet the detective, and he said, with a half smile:

"I guess there is no doubt about Heckman's being in town, Nick."

"Eh? Why not?" asked Nick.

"Gebbe left here just after I talked with you over the phone, to return to his work at the power house. He didn't get there. The uniformed officer on that beat found him, ten minutes ago, dying on the pavement, half a block away from his destination. He had been knocked down with a sand bag, or a club, and then stabbed; but he lived long enough to tell who he was, and that he had been attacked from behind."

"By Jove! it is too bad. Didn't he see the man who struck him?"

"He said just three words to the policeman who found him; then he died. The three words were, 'Gebbe. The man——' Then he died. The first word was his own name, given in reply to the cop's question, who asked, 'Who are you? What is your name?' The other two words must have been the beginning of a sentence which would have been something like this: 'The man who wanted me to turn off the lights;' eh?"

"I think so. Anyhow, Heckman, being the only one of those five men now at liberty, is the only one who would have an interest in Gebbe's death. The only one anyhow, since it was he whom Gebbe would have identified, as having been at the power house that day."

"Exactly." The commissioner turned to the member of his staff again, and added: "Go ahead now, and do what I have directed;" and when the Central Office man had gone out, he turned again to Nick, and asked: "Has it occurred to you just why Washington figures so strongly in this affair, and what Carew was down there about, Nick?"

"Yes, it has; and it will occur to you all the stranger, too, Billy, after I have told you just how I traced Carew to Boston—or to the point of sending the trunk there, and of taking a ticket for Boston himself. There were two messenger boys and two packages; one of them weighed rather more than ten pounds; the other one was light."

"Counterfeit plates and counterfeit money, eh, Nick?"

"Precisely. At least, that is the way I read it."

"It looks that way to me, too; but not for the same reason."

"What then, Billy?"

"While I was in the Secret Service I kept a list of names, with annotations about them. Names that I had been in contact with, and names that had been in the department, in one way or another, before my time. Names of treasury officials and of treasury employees, who had left for one reason or another. It is quite a long list, but it is arranged alphabetically—and it just struck me that I would look for that name, Poster. Now, that doesn't strike you as being a man's name, does it? It didn't strike me so."

"No."

"It just occurred to me that it might be so, and I looked. I found it, too. It's an odd name at that, all of it: Ebenezer Jackman Poster, formerly an engraver, and a very expert one, in the engraving and printing department."

"Go on. That is interesting."

"He left there eight years ago. Partial paralysis of his right hand rendered him unfit for the work—and because of the paralysis, he has not been kept in the eye of the department, as those men always are, who leave the employ of the government. Poster was forgotten—and there is a note in red ink on my memoranda that he died shortly after he left the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. All the same, I suspect that he is alive; eh?"

"Or some one who belonged to him, and who bears the same name, is. It might be that."

"He did the finest class of work in the bureau while he was there, Nick; and it has happened, frequently, that an engraver who was there, or who has been there, has made a plate or two on his own account, even if it has never been used. There is a sort of conceit among the best of them which works itself out in that manner, you know, even though they never reach the point of being really counterfeiters and criminals. Poster used to have a home here in New York. I have telephoned downtown to this branch of the Secret Service, and they are out looking him up now. That part of it belongs to them, rather than to us, Nick. You can bank upon it that we will have all the information we want about Ebenezer Poster before noon to-morrow."

"The thing is narrowing down to a cinch, isn't it, commissioner?" said Nick.

"It looks that way. All we want now is Heckman—and he can't be very far away. I——"

He stopped. There are telephones in the offices of

the commissioners of police that talk aloud; that do not require that you pick up a receiver and put it to your ear, and that particular one began to talk. It said:

"A gentleman to speak to Mr. Carter."

"Go ahead," said the commissioner, from his chair. "He is here, listening."

"It is only I, sir," said the voice of Joseph. "Do you hear me, chief?"

"Yes. Go on," said Nick.

"A telegram from Mister Chick, reads, 'Found trunk—Heckman's—contains counterfeit plates of twenty, ten, five, and three thousand queer, finished, and one thousand, unfinished, also paper prepared for more. Chick.' That is all, sir, except this: There was a telephone call, just before the message came, from a man who wouldn't give his name, but who said that he would call you up again later, or in the morning. I followed out your general instructions, sir, to always find out where a call comes from when a person will not give a name. That one came from a little hotel in Thirty-eighth Street, called the Herilhy Hotel; and that is all, sir."

The detective started to his feet, grasped his hat, and made for the door.

"I'm going to the Hotel Herilhy," he said. "A thousand to one that call came from Heckman;" and he was gone; but the commissioner shouted out: "I am going, too;" and made after Nick Carter.

It was one of the small, corner hotels with which New York abounds, with a gin mill under it, and a sign over the door which read: "For gentlemen only." The proprietor of it was behind the bar. Nick's companion spoke to him; it was just one o'clock—closing time.

"I am a deputy commissioner of police," he said. "Have you a man named Heckman stopping here?"

"No, sir."

"Then I want you to go with me and this gentleman and wake up, one by one, every man in the house till I find the right one. We will begin very quietly at the bottom and work to the top. Lock all outside doors, and give me the keys. Put every man here outside the house, bartenders and all, for the time. It's after one now, anyhow."

The search need not be enlarged upon. In the third room they entered Heckman sat up in bed and blinked at them; and then, when he saw and recognized Nick Carter, he turned pale and reached under his pillow for the gun that was there in readiness.

But Nick sprang forward, seized Heckman's wrist, and tried to wrench the gun away from him, although in doing so, Heckman managed somehow to turn the muzzle of it upon himself, and pulled the trigger, sending the ball into his own body.

"It is all up," he gasped, while the proprietor ran, at the command of the commissioner, to summon a doctor—one of the customers of the place who had just gone out. "I suppose you have got me for Gebbe; eh?"

"Yes; for killing Gebbe. That was a useless crime, Heckman. He had already given his information," said Nick. "But we have also got you, if you live, for killing Carew."

"I won't live; and I did not kill Carew. Coyne did that—and I know that you have believed all along that Coyne or Catlin did it. Coyne did it, and I'm glad to tell on him. I owe him one, anyway. Do you know anything else, Nick Carter?"

"About the counterfeit plates, and money—yes."

"Found them, I suppose, in my room. I ought to have hidden them away before I left there—but I didn't. I don't suppose you have found out who Carew really is, have you?"

"No; but you will tell us, won't you?"

"Not on your life! Nit! I'm dying, but I won't tell you that. It's all up with me, but there are others who will come after me who will get even with you. But I want to do one bit of justice before I die. That fellow Sturges ain't in it, Carter, so don't mix him up in the affair. I have said my last word now, except this: You can tell Coyne that I peached on him for that old affair between us; he will understand, and he'll give up the goods, too; that is, he'll admit that he did the killing—or Catlin will do it for him, to save himself. That's all I've got to say."

Half an hour after that, while the doctor was working over him, Heckman collapsed and died.

Down at headquarters the following day, Coyne, in the presence of witnesses, confessed to the shooting of Jasper Carew—but, like Heckman, refused utterly to tell who Carew really was. He also insisted that Sturges had had no connection with the others in the crime.

Sterling and Catlin, upon learning of Heckman's death, and Coyne's confession, made the same statement—but also refused information about Carew; and each and every one of them denied that they knew anything about the plates, or the counterfeit money, or had ever heard of a man named Poster.

And that afternoon the commissioner received information from the Secret Service that Ebenezer Jackman Poster was long since dead, and that nothing, so far, could be learned of his having any descendants.

THE END.

Aphasia, or complete loss of memory, is generally a thing for physicians to handle and puzzle over; but there was one case of it which was put up to our friend Nick Carter, and his treatment of it excited the admiration of many physicians and experts. Incidentally the investigation and treatment of the case led to the discovery of what the great detective was forced to admit was "a splendid plot;" and it set him, as well as Chick and Patsy, upon one of the hottest trails in all their experience. The story is called "The Seven Schemers; or, Nick Carter Foils a Splendid Plot." No. 744. Out next week.

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